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### POLISH SHORT STORIES

This collection of short stories includes works by such writers as Reymont, Sienkiewicz, Zeromski, Weysenhoff and others.

### SCARLET MUSE

An anthology of Polish poems in English translation with a long introduction.

THE  
WINTER  
MAIDENS  
AND  
OTHER SHORT STORIES

*Edited by*  
UMADEVI

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## FOREWORD.

This new bunch of Polish tales forms a sequence to the "Polish short-stories" published last year; and though it includes the names of five authors only, against eleven in the first volume, it brings us a no less rich crop of realistic prose poetry, typical folklore, and recent history in striking images.

The Indian reader may - or may not - remember that, of all Slavic nations Poland is the only one that possesses a cultural and literary background broad enough, and a line of continuous literary evolution sufficiently long to make it possible for such a refined and thousand-faceted creation of the human mind as the modern short-story is, to evolve towards psychological terseness and artistic perfection. In fact, Maupassant, who is to the modern short story what the Pole Kopernick is to astronomy, and whose features are discernible behind the faces of most of his good or bad imitators of all countries, could not have been himself, had not the land of his birth produced, before it produced him, a long chain of narrators, such as Merimee, Stendhal, Gerard de Nerval, Musset, Voltaire, Diderot, La Fontaine, etc., back to the authors of the medieval fables. But, to that rule exceptions are not wanting. That of Tchekhov, for instance. From his only Russian predecessor in the field of the short-story, namely Turgeniev, Tchekhov does not seem to have inherited much. Yet, the world, so small now a days, was already a human unit eighty years ago, Turgeniev was a contemporary, even a friend of Maupassant; and the Russian story-teller has undoubtedly been influenced by the French one in the workmanship of his short-stories. Thus, what Tchekhov missed in native technical initiation, he may have derived from foreign sources. This lessens in no way his own originality; however enriched he may have been by French or English masters of the art in question Tchekhov is none

the less a master of the short-story. Many Western flowers and trees feel quite at home in the Indian hills; likewise European art has often adorned itself with Persian or Far-Eastern motives and styles. For art, though nourished by alien ground, remains in the hands of a master, a genuine personal achievement. Apply this rule and its exceptions to modern Indian narrators and, though remembering that India was, at the birth of times, a fountain, nay, an ocean of narration, you will admit that some of her best 19th and 20th century story-tellers, Tagore, S C. Chatterjee. Prem Chand, while their stories are pervaded by the inimitable Indian flavour, generated by soil, surroundings and tradition, have thoroughly digested whatever elements they happen to have derived from the West.

If we now examine the present Polish tales we are struck by the fact that they are Polish through and through. The Polish language and literary style, unlike those of other Slavic nations, have been refined by more than 400 years of undiscontinued social and artistic evolution. Their authors have had scores of native predecessors, so, no foreign help was needed. Thus, not only is every bit of 'couleur locale', every touch of folklore in them intensely national, but their very atmosphere is unmistakably, exclusively Polish. And it filters everywhere though the English grab. All the tragic historical background, all the scenery, all the 'dharma' of Poland are there. And the Polish character too. Mad with 'dream through action', incorrigibly idealistic, chivalrous to the verge of Don Quixotism, equally bold in the fields of war and spirit, the Polish soul unfolds itself before us, with its discrete pride, mostly hinted at, seldom expressed, its healthy joviality, its deep mystical bias, its unabated optimism, pursued even when the body is crushed into shreds. We also detect that note of occasional sadness, soon atavistic in a race of men who love freedom in every form more than anything else and more than anybody else but are denied for ever, it seems, the right to live a useful

and dignified life of their own in their own homeland. To repeat incessantly that the Poles have for ages, and in ages of chaos, defended and several times saved Western civilization against Tartars, Huns (of various breeds), and other invaders to ask why they should be doomed, even by their forgetful friends, to fall from the claws of one invader into the clutches of a worse one, all this may sound like a rigmarole of tiresome and useless recriminations. But let the writer of these lines - who is not a Pole remind his Indian readers that such 'rigmaroles' were repeated and repeated about India herself by her sincerest friends for scores of years, until at last the world **had** to listen to them, to take them seriously, to take them into account, and to act in consequence. True, the patriots of India themselves fought the battle; but a sympathetic world opinion, informed and stirred by many Indian and non-Indian 'recriminators', seconded their efforts, and finally, the fight was decided. If the Poles had not one friend left on the face of the earth, - thank God, they still have many - it would still be in the fitness of things that Indians should understand them, sympathize with them, spiritually, if not actually, stand by them and, to begin with, know them as they are. But let us return to our tales.

The first three are by Casimir Tetmayer, the renowned novelist who wrote the epic of the Polish Highlands, wove into tales the ways, customs, moods and dreams of the peasants, farmers, woodmen, shepherds, minstrels of the Eastern Carpathians. The first story, "Maryna", (it is a girl's name and has nothing to do with Madras' beautiful beach-road), is a continuation of "Far off Marysia", another tale of Tetmayer, published in our first volume. Yasyek Mosyenzni, the Tatra willage fiddler, had lost his head on Marysia, a village girl who liked him, but loved another. Now, Maryna, the rich and haughty farm heiress who has nothing but contempt for every man, turns a kind eye on him. The unexpected good fortune soothes

his wounded heart, and the world might become a heaven of joy for him, but he hesitates and misses his chance, for he is "a soft one".

The "Winter-maidens", the second tale, are the fairies of the Tatra mountains. They appear and roam in bands about the sky when the peaks are capped with snow and the lakes frozen over, and forests and dales get entangled in long scarfs of white mist alternately torn to pieces and knitted together again by the teeth of an icy wind. They might also be the souls of pious maidens, or nuns, whom some busy angel dropped from his bag, on his way from earth to heaven on some winter night. So thinks the crippled shepherd who used to climb with his flock to high mountain pastures, but now lies prostrate, or crawls about the village. for his panting heart no longer allows him to leave the valley, and his sole consolation is to watch the Winter-maidens in their flight.

"Zwyrtala" is another fiddler's tale. Tetmayer, son of a Tatra farmer, and "a lyrical poet of rare timbre", says W. A. Rose in his "Polish Literature" has interspersed all these fiddlers' stories with short lyrics which stand for the tunes played by the fiddlers, and whose words are probably inspired by genuine Tatra folksongs.

"Temptation", by Piotr Choynowski, is the story of a boy who had been sent to a Russian school far away from his home in Poland, and has come to his aunt's house, not far from his school town, for Easter holiday. He naively tells his people of the insidious ways in which he is daily given to understand there that his country is really no country, but a Russian province, that Poles are not Poles, but Russian subjects, and that they ought to give up their language, and also their religion, for the Russian Orthodox faith alone can be taken seriously, by Russians and others, being the State religion of a mighty Empire. You will at once fancy some Indian youth submitted, in some fashionable school in England or India, to the same influ-

ences. But the elders' reaction to the subtle effect the Russian surroundings have exercised on the youth's mind is typical. The aunt is preparing an Easter cake and has just adorned it with the traditional Polish inscription in icing letters Alleluja! Praise ye God! But knowing that every Russian visitor will wonder and ask interminable questions as to the meaning of these unknown Latin letters, the boy suggests, "I say, aunt, why not write "Alleluja" in Russian letters?" That is the "Temptation", a subtle but dangerous one. For this first step on a slippery path may in the future lead the boy to defection, to the abandonment of his ancestral heritage, his language, his religion...The aunt's indignation, her severity in dealing with that mild suggestion may seem strangely exaggerated the boy is confined to his room for the rest of his holiday, he is made as it were an outcast in the house! Yet, it was by such lessons, such "reactions" that Polish mothers of the former generations strengthened their children's resistance to national annihilation, made the survival of Poland's soul possible.

The next two tales, "Peasant Wedding" and "Contrast". are two chapters of Wadylaw Reymont's famous "Seasons", the cyclic novel in 4 parts which was given the award of the Nobel Academy of Stockholm in 1924. Sienkiewicz, the former Nobel prize-winner, had described, also in a cycle of 4 volumes, the heroics of medieval Poland; Reymont writes the rural epic of his country, and the peaceful epic surpasses the warlike one, for if nations are some times defended and saved by the sword, they live by the plough. The "Peasant Wedding" depicts, together with the two wedding parties, the throng of the wedding guests, which is as numerous and many-coloured as an Indian one, would be, but more boisterous, and less sober. Floods of wine and mead are streaming, and also floods of music, of that unique Polish popular music Chopin has immortalized in his "mazurkas" and "polonaises". The "Contrast is brought in by the poor farm-boy who has been shot at some

days before while poaching, and hides in the stable. Dishes and drinks are struggled over to him by a friend, but he cannot touch them, and dies listening to the wedding music

J. M. Herbert's two stories introduce us to a more realistic tone of narration, as they are framed in the texture of World War No 2. "How to escape" sketches the semi-tragic, semi-humorous adventures of some of the Polish refugee soldiers who had crossed the Rumanian frontier after the ordeal of September-October 1939. They have no scruple in fooling the simple minded Rumanian boundary-guards and Custom-officers, the only purpose of the joke being for them to find their way to France and England, where those who were crushed on the ground yesterday by better armed enemies will rise to the sky tomorrow and deal death in their turn. Such a one is Sargeant Prost, who appears in the second story.

He had seen with his own eyes some months before his red-robed fifteen year old daughter swinishly machine-gunned by a foul Nazi airman on a country lawn near Cracow. Since then he has become a night-fighter and serves in one of the British squadrons that defend the Channel ports. He hardly speaks with anyone, but every time he has a chance - and he gets one almost every night - in the gloom of the winter sky, or right under the eyes of the stars, when the sky is clear, he settles his account.

"Torture", the last tale, a chapter of the "Secret State", by Jan Karski, officer in the Underground Polish Army during the German occupation, is no tale at all. For we know well that the most gruesome episodes of the narration are absolutely authentic. Minutely exact, and the whole thing but a scrupulous diary of the author's work, a sober and cold-blooded report of his movements in the task of coordinating the sabotage of the invader's war instruments and the decimation of his forces. "Torture" describes what happens to him after he has been caught

red-handed by the Gestapo. In every war, franc-tirsurs are captured and shot but in the recent one a more refined technique was applied to them, We see the Nazi grinding machine at work on the person of the liaison officer Karski, who has been arrested as he was starting for a mission abroad, and is being handled by S. S. specialists. The machine works marvellously well, and the work pursued till every joint in the victim's body cracks and bursts, till the flesh is turned into pulp and the last drop of blood gushes out. By a sheer miracle Karski escapes and goes on with his work. These were terrible times. The Polish underground men, women and children stood sternly, unflinchingly to all, thinking that the day of liberation was bound to come sooner or later for Poland and her heart, Warsaw, and then . . . Well, the liberation day of Warsaw did come, but the liberation turned out to be no liberation at all, but just the opposite, though the price for it had been paid in full, paid in advance. Let us suppose for a moment that, after landing at Cherbourg in June 1944, after they had driven the beaten German armies eastwards, after the self-liberation of Paris, which was, by the way, far easier than that of Warsaw, let us imagine the British war lords telling France "Look here, my friends, we have now saved you from your aggressors, so, we have a perfect right to keep Normandy, - which belonged to us in the past and Brittany - which is inhabited by people formerly emigrated from Wales. Moreover, to make sure that the Germans never attack us again, we beg to present you, in order to make things still safer for us, with a Government and a President selected by us, plus a Parliament of deputies whose elections will be controlled by us after one or two years of military occupation of all the rest of France.. etc. I daresay the surprise of the French would have been great, and their reaction immediate. But the Britishers said nothing of the kind. They too had tried for about 150 years to assure their next door neighbours under futile



pretexts, but that was 500 years ago and not yesterday. They may be blunt and hard-hearted merchants, yet, they have not so far, tried to impose by military force a totalitarian doctrine on a brother nation. As for the Poles, they were, in the occurrence, not surprised at all. What ! They didn't see the difference between the old and the new Russia ? Well, they had seen it quite well in the attempted invasion of 1921, and they saw it still more distinctly in September 1939 ! And they see and feel it pretty well today

For, what the Nazi brute had practised as an art, a cruel and sadic game, their successors, Poles tell us, carried it and are still carrying it on as a science, the science of sucking off other men's souls, ( in the best interest of the victim, well understood ), the science of injecting another nation's blood into their veins, of thrusting better, more human ideologies into their brains German deportations and execution and wholesale gassings have ceased, but other deportations en masse, and purges and mock-elections are going on. And till when will they go on my God ? Till the Poles, if any Pole is left, will be able, following a recent example, to tell the robber of half their territory, the enslaver of the other half, these square words, "Quit Poland !"

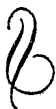
The purpose of our introduction to the second volume of "Polish short-stories" was not meant to include any kind of political or ideological polemic. But, as the Gospel says, there are occasions when even the stones would cry. Let us state again that our object in publishing these stories is merely to bring before the enlightened Indian public other examples of the Polish literary achievement as regards the art of the short-story, most of which saw the light before the first world war. Real Poland is of course fighting everywhere in the world for the salvation of her soul and body. But let us not overlook or underrate the fact that she is, and that we are confronted with another task no less important, namely Poland's cultural mission in the future of

mankind. This culture is so rich, so original, so precious that it **must** keep its well deserved place in the store-house of human values. We cannot allow it to degenerate or to be done away with, we simply cannot do without it. Now, it happens that present Poland, official Poland, fictitious Poland, gagged Poland is enjoined by millions of charitable advisers, armed to the upper teeth, to be anti-Polish! How can then such an un-Polish Poland go on expanding on the rest of the world cultural values real Poland started creating long before a German, a Russian state had come into existence? Of course nobody wants to deny that these two states too contributed to the advance of world culture, but they did so after Poland, after they had become constituted as free nations, they were already imperialistic, but not yet totalitarian. As for the land that gave birth to Kopernick, Sobieski, Kosciuszko, Mickiewicz, Slowacki, Chopin, Paderewski, Curie Sklodowska and so forth, let us keep in mind that it was not born yesterday. It was a land of paradoxical freedom, a centre of religious tolerance unequalled anywhere at any time, a harmonious community of warriors, peasants, scholars, artisans and artists: warriors who did not indulge in a single war of conquest, peasants who made a garden, an orchard of their country, artisans and artists in architecture, painting, music, poetry and romance of unique originality. The amazing disasters that have marked Poland's national history since 1772, including her present political and moral vassalage, ought not to divert our minds from that significant and universally acknowledged fact.

Prof. V. B.



# MARYNA



(by K. P. Tetmajer)



*Maryna the miller's daughter goes down to the mill by the water.*

*From the mill she's homeward faring, her flour with no man sharing.*

THUS folk sang about Maryna, Kruzel's daughter of Rogoznik village. Later on another verse came into use which ran thus

*Maryna the miller's daughter goes glad to the mill by the water,*

*But Mat the mayor's son meetly taught her to walk there discreetly.*

That was later on, though, after the wedding. Mat really did show her how to behave when she walked abroad.

She was a girl whose equal you couldn't easily find in the neighborhood. At Ludzimir at a pardon or in the town or at Black Dunayec at the fair there wasn't a man who wouldn't look at her hard, or a woman who wouldn't stare her through and through. She was tall and straight and held her head high. Her eyebrows were black, as if they had been painted, set high above her eyes. Her forehead was smooth, and she had immense, dark blue eyes. Her nose was straight, her mouth was red and small. Her chin was round. Her hair was black and glossy, as if it had been polished, and so abundant that she could cover herself with it as with a cape. And then there was the color of her face, the sunburnt blush on her swarthy skin, and then there was her slender neck and her bosom boldly outlined beneath her bodice. There was the lovely line of her waist, her figure, supple and full, her whole body, that seemed to be fashioned of soft iron. And her voice! . . . When she sang it seemed that the world would melt. . . . When she walked, even through the greatest crowd, she had no need to say:

"Make way!" Everyone who looked at her made way for her.

But even so fate had something in store for her.

The girl was a rich one, proud, bold and disobliging. Her father was the chief man in the village, old Bart Kruzal, whose place had been called "White Martin's" ever since his grandfather's time. He was a widower. He had nobody but her and thought the world of her. He had a holding of about fifty acres, about five acres of woodland, a tremendous great farm and the mill. And that wench Maryna kept watch on the miller's boy the whole time so that nobody should have a chance to steal a grain of flour, and kept continually going back and forwards between the house and the mill till people began to sing songs about that way of hers. But none dared to sing them when her eyes were upon them, for she had eyes like glowing brands, like fire glittering on water. When she looked at a fellow it just went through him. One farm-hand from Ostrowsk who was driving a cart with wine in it when he caught sight of her, leaned back in the cart and went dumb for a moment and just opened his mouth. She smiled and passed on, and then he said

"Has a she-devil taken woman's form, or what? But if such as she live in hell I'd like to burn there up to my ears!"

Nobody took to her, because of her disobligingness and pride. She was already twenty, but had no wish to be married.

"Maryna, will you never wed?" asked her aunt.

"Is there anyone worthy of me?" she asked in return.

"Dost know," went on her aunt, "what folk sing?"

*Why dost thou scorn me, maiden, why dost thou say me nay?*

*If I don't wed thee, maiden, no noble will come thy way.*

"And didn't you hear, aunt, what old Budz was telling, how a king's son came to a wheelwright's daughter?"

"Fairy tales!"

## MARYNA

But it came to pass that Jasiek Mosienzny, called the Musician, met her.

It happened thus. He couldn't get over his refusal by Marysia from Chocholov, though several years had passed since they parted—perhaps three. He went no more to Koscieliska Valley, and even ceased to wander through Cold or Rocky Podhale, he even kept more to the low-lying villages and played less but worked more at carpentry and sawing but when he played it was a hundred times more beautifully than before. It is enough to say that the Hungarian gypsies wanted him to join a troupe of theirs that played even in Buda-Pesth. He refused.

He heard that Gonsiorek of Rogoznik wanted a man to do sawing and carpentry. He took service with him.

Then the wenches and older women of Rogoznik were glad, for they had heard of him (as they had heard of Janicek of old, whose good looks were so famous and who came to a sad end through an unkind maiden) that there was no such music as his in the world. But it was reported of him, too, that all through that three years since he had parted with Marysia he had had no love-affair with any woman. And at Rogoznik, too, he looked at the girls as if they had been daws on a red fir tree. That was all he cared about them!

But that state of things didn't last long. Kuba Gonsiorek of the sawmill said to him one day

"Look here Jasiek, take this spring wheat up to White Martin to be ground."

"All right."

Then old Gonsiorek smiled to himself, and asked

"Have you seen the miller's girl?"

"Which one?"

"The mayor's daughter."

"No."

"Then beware or she'll eat you."

"Oh, if I haven't been eaten till now, even she won't eat me."

POLISH SHORT STORIES

"Beware, I tell you! Stephen, son of Simeon from Ludzimir, ran away to Pesth because of her Kuba Gonsiorek from our own Rogoznik itself is drinking so that there's no hope for him. Vaclav Jahymiak has gone quite stupid—and all because of her"

"I'm not afraid"

"Have you anything with you to save you from bewitchment?"

"I have"

Then old Gonsiorek got terribly curious. He bent his gray head, with its long locks and its plaits hanging down from the temples, towards Jasiek and asked

"What is it? What? What have you? I won't betray you. Do tell me!"

"Oh, what I have I have. It'd be no good to you."

"Have you got it on you?"

"I always have it"

"Where? In your belt?"

"Maybe so, if my belt were broad enough"

"How can that be? I don't understand"

"Oh, father, 'twould be in my belt if my belt were broad enough to cover my heart. Where's the spring wheat?"

But old Gonsiorek kept looking at him, and asked.

"It's on your heart, is it?"

"Just so."

"How can that be? Is it stuck on? Is it a kind of plaster?"

"It's not stuck on. It has to be swallowed to get down to the heart," said Jasiek.

Old Gonsiorek put his head on one side

"You're saying queer things," says he "Will you show it to me? Couldn't I swallow it?"

"Oh, you'd have to go to Koscieliska Valley to see what it's like."

"Is it there?"

"Just so."

"And who gave it to you?"

"Why are you asking so much about it? Where's the wheat?"

Old Gonsiorek was silent for a moment, then he laughed outright, and said

"You're right. Why do I ask when I have, here on my head, the best safeguard against all kinds of charms"—and he stroked his gray locks "

"Come along, Jasiek," he continued, "and let's put the spring wheat into the sack."

A little while later it was with Jasiek the Musician as if a thunderbolt had struck him.

He went along carrying the sack on his back and came near to the mill, and before it stood Maryna, the miller's daughter.

"Are you coming to the mill?" she asked.

Jasiek looked for a moment at her, and his legs bent under him and his face went white, though he had a good large sack on his back.

For the glance of Maryna's eyes pierced him through and through

She only smiled a little, a smile that fitted over her thin lips, and she looked at him loftily, boldly, and he just stood before her, bending under his sack.

"Come on!" she said, "We'll take it over to the mill."

Jasiek gave the sack of grain to the miller's lad to be ground.

"You work not far from here?" said Maryna.

"You're the music-man, Jasiek, from Gonsiorek's."

"I am." She did not address him as an equal, but spoke



to him as she would have spoken to a shepherd, he remarked.

"Come tomorrow morning for the flour," she said.

"All right"

He wanted to say "good-bye," but she looked no more at him, and went away from the mill through the meadow, towards her home

Jasiek turned to go back

With that Maryna's voice sounded—the air bore it far and wide

*Lily, lily, how came you here, where the high peaks loom?*

*In the valleys you grow dear, on the mountains you bloom,*

*Give me in marriage, mother, while the folk ask for me.*

*While the lily is blooming it's plucked for its flower, you see.*

*Give me in marriage, mother, now, ere my beauty pass.*

*The lily is sweet, my mother, while it blooms in the grass*

*Give me in marriage, mother! Like the lily some even-tide.*

*I'll be blown away by the wind, dear, far over the world so wide.*

*Mother, my little mother, and never a bit you'll know*

*Where did the little lily out of your garden go.*

Lovely indeed was the singing—as sweet, as wonderful as if a mother were singing her child to sleep.

Jasiek Mosienzny couldn't conceive how such a kind, caressing voice could come from a wench like that, who looked so arrogant and proud. It pierced his heart through and through, for, you see, he was a musician himself, and he felt it more than others.

He walked on, looking about him, and Maryna glided through the meadows with a yellow kerchief on her head,

M A R Y N A

with white sleeves and a red bodice, and with a red cloak over her dark skirt, the colors shimmering on her like flowers on the meadow, so splendid was she—a very flaming torch! Jasiek kept glancing at her.

And she kept on singing from afar, still more sweetly, still more enchantingly,

*Hear Janicek's music through our valleys go—*

*Like the sheep that wander through the bushes low.*

*Our Janicek's glory ne'er will die away*

*In the valleys pleasant, on the mountains grey.*

Her voice rang and his heart melted within him.

*Come thou boldly, Janicek, when you see in the window  
hay—*

*If there's straw in the window, mother's at home today.*

Jasiek's heart leaped within him.

But she, still singing, disappeared into a willow-grove that grew just by the village.

Jas's heart quivered and he thought to himself, "How could that be? She only just sang like that. Would such a wench think of me? Why, she didn't even deign to look at me!"

In this doubting mood he went towards Gonsiorek's sawmill, and everything in him was a-quiver.

"Well, how went it?" asked Gonsiorek. "Did you give the spring wheat to be ground?"

"I did."

"Did you see the miller's daughter?"

"I did."

"And what then?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Did what you swallowed in the Koscieliska Valley keep you safe?"

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

"Where are the planks we were to saw?" asked Jasiiek.

"Oho!" thought old Gonsiorek, it defeneded you nicely if you're in such a hurry for work! Go and drink another pint of that medicine." Aloud he said:

"The planks? The planks are ready, take them. But it seems to me that your hands will shake to-day."

Jasiek answered nothing, and went away to saw the planks.

Old Gonsiorek went to smear the wheels of his cart with black grease, for he intended to go to the fair at Novy Targ

But as for Jasiek, something was already melting inside him. He cut the planks, he sawed them, and before his eyes was Maryna's beauty and her singing sounded in his ears.

Marysia of Chocholov, far-off Marysia, had been like honey, but this one was like fire. By her singing she had first laid a charm on him and then made advances to him. Why had she done it? It was certain that she hadn't sung as she had done without a reason. She must have seen him somewhere in church, someone must have pointed him out to her. . . .

Poor unfortunate Jasiek Mosienzny had a heart of this sort. Three hundred women might hang round his neck at once and he wouldn't say a word, but when he hit on the right one, good-bye to him! There was neither vein nor rib in him—wax!

"I'll be done for through her," thought he.

"If a fellow tried?" he thought again.

"Eh, you may try to get anything out of her, you may!" he said to himself. "It's not your luck."

"I had no luck there in Koscieliska. Perhaps the Lord'll bless me here."

"He didn't bless better men than you."

"Oh, just to see her once more!"

"Why, man, you're going up for the flour tomorrow,"

"And that Marysia over there in Chocholov?"

But the memory of Marysia from Chocholov in Jas's fastidious but artistically sensitive heart had faded suddenly like a picture exposed to the rain.

"The far-off one? Marysia? If only she had wanted me! But she won't wed anyone—ever!"

And that immense word "ever" made Jasiek's inward dissension cease.

That night—it was in July, and fine, starry weather—Jasiek played for a long time on the willow-pipe (for he knew how to play on everything), sitting on the sawing-block in the yard. And old Gonsiorek, lying in his bed, muttered to himself "Squeak, squeak! You'll squeak louder still, never fear! Already your soul's creeping out of the holes in the willow. Soon it'll be hopping all over your body like a bird on the branches."

Jasiek Mosienzny slept little that night until just before dawn, when he went sound asleep and dreamed that a procession was coming, and in that procession was Marysia of Chocholov, and she turned her face to him—he was standing at the side—and said to him "Oh, Jas, it's just my cursed fate!"

And she disappeared and something threw him, and it was as if he were falling down a precipice.

Next day he went early to the mill for flour, and as he got nearer he got hotter and hotter

Maryna was standing in the doorway

"May the Lord be praised!" said Jasiek, and raised his hat.

"Forever and ever, Amen," said Maryna.

"Is the flour ready?"

"It is so."

She measured it out to him herself. He scarcely dared to look at her, but when he did her eyes were on him, glowing like altar-candles

POLISH SHORT STORIES

"Hey, you've no business here!" he thought to himself.

Then, as he was about to take the sack away, Maryna said to him

"Jasiek, do you know I've turned away the horse-boy? Wouldn't you take a job with us?"

"I?"

"You?"

"With you?"

"Just so."

He looked at her. She stood before him like the sunrise.

"Would you like to have me—really and truly?"

"Aye indeed! Why should I play a trick on you?"

It went light and dark before Jas's eyes.

"I'll take service with you,"

"Then give Gonsiorek notice and move in to us."

"Did you ask the mayor, your dad?"

"Dad does everything I want."

"When can I come?"

"Today, even."

Jasiek went back to the sawmill to tell Gonsiorek he was leaving, and Maryna sat on the threshold of the mill and sang.

*Though I look on one lad, though I look on two,  
You're not here, Janicek, and I wait for you  
Curs'd is all my loving, curs'd, for all in vain  
You have bound my heart, dear, with a silver chain.  
On the mountain meadow, swallow, build your nest.  
Heart of mine, take comfort, calm thee, be at rest.  
But the little swallow far has flown away  
And my heart is mourning ever and a day.*

That was the song that followed swiftly after Jasiek; wistful, tuneful notes sent out into the world like the bran-

ches of the beech-tree, like the sparkling strands of the spider's web in autumn, and it flooded Jasiek's soul and confused it, and all the blood from his hands and feet ran to his heart, so powerfully did Maryna's song work upon him !

"That wench will eat you," prated old Gonsiorek as he paid Jas for his services

"Let her eat me now ! Do you know what Janoshek said when they had tormented him and were going to hang him ? "As you've roasted me, now eat me, too !" answered Jasiek.

Then a strange time began for him

Maryna, like a king's daughter, busied herself about the house and the mill, and he kept round about her like as he would have done round about a princess. Never a word, never anything ! Jasiek dried up, he couldn't eat, he couldn't sleep. It seemed to him that he could have her for the taking, but nothing happened

He had no power over himself, he had attacks as of the ague, but he felt so shy that he couldn't force himself to advance a step towards Maryna. The words stuck fast in his throat and in his breast.

Until one morning he thought to himself

"Why should I torment myself here ? I'll fling everything to the four winds and go to the devil."

And so he decided.

But it happened that there came a child at dinner-time to Kruzel's, a little, tiny, three-year-old boy, belonging to Philomena Komperda, a relative of the mayor's late wife.

"What have you come for ?" asked old Kruzel

"For apples," said the child.

"Do you like me ?"

"Yes, I do "

"And do you like that girl ?" asked the mayor, pointing to Maryna

And the little boy said "I don't like her."

POLISH SHORT STORIES

"You don't like me?" asked Maryna.

"I don't like you."

"Not even a bit—a tiny bit?"

"I don't like you."

"Not even that much?" and she showed him the end of her finger and smiled, and spoke with such a lovely, caressing voice that it seemed to Jasiek that the fuchsias on the window-sill bent their flowers towards her to listen.

"Not even that much?"

And the boy reflected, and said "just that much"

And Maryna's eyes shone like quiet stars after sunset.

And Jasiek the Music Man stayed and tended the mayor's horses

"Oh, if you were not what you are, Maryna," he thought, and bit his lip "If you were not so beautiful, so proud, so rich Oh, if you were not what you are!"

"Oh, if you were not what you are! If even you were as beautiful and as proud, but not so rich!"

What would she think first of all?—That those fifty acres of ground, those five acres of forest, those horses, those cows, those sheep, that mill, still more than herself, smelt sweet to him. And she would look at him in a way that he couldn't bear.

Old Shymek Tyrala, son of Stash, told the truth when he said that those music men were somehow quite different people, that even though some of them were wonderful and clever, if there happened to be a stupid one, he was the very devil! For anyhow anyone that wanted to marry a girl like Maryna would naturally think first of all about her fortune and only afterwards about her beauty, and nobody would wonder at it, not even she herself. But Jasiek was one of those music men who were not wise.

"If she had been poor . . . But as it was!"

If any man or woman could have heard him meditating like that they would have said to him.

"Why, you're as stupid as a ram!"

Soon afterwards it happened that Andrew Kruzel, Maryna's uncle, on her father's side, gave his daughter in marriage

Jasiek played at the wedding, and with him was another fiddler and a double-bass player. The wenches were like roes, like flowers! But what were any of them to Maryna?

Jasiek played, and had eyes for none but for her.

There came to that wedding Mat (son of a former mayor of Rogoznik, Bartholomew Fita). Folk called him "the mayor's Mat" or "the little mayor's little Mat." He had just left the army, the cavalry. He had a red cap on his head, a blue jacket on him, he was a comely lad, graceful, well-built and not poor. When a stamped to a quick-time Rogoznik tune, one saw the sparks fly, though he wore leathern sandals

He led Maryna out to dance the polka—oh, when they began to go!

He had been abroad, in Vienna, in Pressburg, in Olo-munietz. There he had learnt to dance with Austrian frau-leins, with Czech "holkas." He took Maryna round the waist, clasped her to him, carried her through the air

The company was called to table. It was late at night. Jasiek went out into the field to breathe the fresh air, for he was tired with playing, but that was nothing. His heart was like to break with grief, jealousy, pain and anger. He had sat playing by the wall, he had played till the hairs from his bow flew about and that other had clasped Maryna, that other had carried her and pressed her to his breast!

When he came back "the little Mayor's little Mat" threw him three pence for his fiddling, called a tune and went to dance with the bride. As for Jasiek, he was inclined to dash his fiddle to the earth and jump up and seize Mat by the throat.

But he didn't . . . He did nothing.

Four weeks hadn't passed when the betrothal of Mat, the little mayor's son, to the miller's Maryna was announced.



## POLISH SHORT STORIES

Jasiek wanted to fling everything away and run to the devil, but Maryana kept saying to him

“ You’ll play at my wedding, Jasiek ?”

So he stayed on.

Mat kept on coming to Kruzel’s day after day, always merry, always smiling, always happy. Once, when Maryna answered her father back arrogantly at supper, Mat said to her “Do you know, Maryna, if you were ever to answer me back that way, I would smack you so hard that you wouldn’t be able to sit down for three days Remember that!”

Maryna’s eyes gleamed. The company happened to be eating sour beet soup. She drew back her hand with the spoon in it, and cried “I’ll hit you on the muzzle, now, here on the very spot!”

And Mat clenched his fist and said “Hit me!”

But Maryna bent her head and started eating again, and old Kruzel, the miller, said

“That’s the way! Holy Lord when a women makes for one with a harrow one should make for her with a flail. When a woman makes for one with a knife one should make for her with a scythe That’s the right way, holy Lord!” This was Kruzel’s manner of speech.

But Jasiek’s heart died within him.

Towards night he was going through the yard when he saw Maryna sitting on a tree-stump by the cowshed and crying.

“ Why are you crying, Maryna?” he asked her tenderly and with awe, for it was the first time he had seen her weeping.

“ Because he’ll beat me.”

“ Who?”

“ Mat ”

“ Then don’t marry him.”

“ How can I not when he wants me to ?

MARYNA

"But you can *not* want to."

"I can't."

"Have you fallen in love with him?"

"No, but I'm as if I were charmed."

"*You* are?"

"I am "

Jasiek sat down heavily beside her.

"Maryna, listen!" he said. "Why did you engage me to serve you?"

"Because I like you."

"Me "

"You "

"Why do you tell me that now? Oh, sweetest Lord Jesus!"

"I liked you . . . because of the fame that went forth of you through the world. Folk talked of you."

"And now?"

"And now nothing It's over done with."

"Over and done with?"

"Forever."

"Why? What for?"

"Because you're as nothing to me."

"Why? I'd have lain at your feet and been as faithful as a dog to you. I'd have looked at you as at a star "

"That's just what I don't like in you—you're soft."

"Is the other better, who will beat you?"

"But he's a man!"

Jasiek Mosienzny grabbed his head in both his hands.

"Maryna!" he cried. "I would have been better not to say that. God's wounds!"

And he rocked his unhappy head to and fro, and a despairing grief possessed him.

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

Then Maryna said

"I didn't know. I thought 'Like me he does, but if he loved me he would have made advances to me' I'm not the kind to stretch out my claws to anyone first"—and she raised her head proudly.

But Jasiek rocked to and fro in his pain. "Hey . . . that's what I should have done . . . and I never knew . . . and what now?"

"It's over and done with."

"Suddenly Jasiek jumped up. "And what if I killed him?" he cried

"But Maryna answered Then they'd shut you up in prison and hang you, and even if they didn't I'd never be your wife. There's a soft spirit in you—a child's, not a man's."

"What'll happen to us now?"

"Nothing. I've lost the will to be yours. You're soft "

Jasiek stood up.

"Good-bye," he said

"Oh, no! You must play at my wedding "

"For nothing in the world!"

"Little Jasiek! Why, you like me, don't you? You'll play for me. Don't say nay."

So Jasiek stayed and played

He played for three days and three nights, for so great a wedding did Kruzel give his daughter. He played so that his strings not only cracked but broke, and he tore a whole new bow to pieces. He played till the skin came off his fingers, till his heel began to get sore from stamping with it, and water streamed from his hair for three days and three nights. He played so that folk wondered at him, and it seemed to him that his spirit had got into his fiddle, and that he was lashing and lashing and lashing it with his bow, and saying to it. "You're soft—soft—soft! A child's spirit, not a man's."

## MARYNA

Throughout the three days and nights of Maryna's wedding nothing passed his lips but wine and brandy. He drank and played. Near dawn on the third night the wedding ended, and so did Jasiek's playing.

He said goodbye to none, he wanted to see nobody; he left his things behind him and went in what he stood up in. With his fiddle only under his arm he went his way from Rogoznik

He met old Gonsiorek, who was walking round his fence and putting in new sticks. He had been at the wedding, too, for a short time, and was glad that his young wife Margaret stayed on there and that he could rest himself without her at home

Jasiek said not a word and would have passed him by, but old Gonsiorek put a hand on his arm

"You don't even give me greeting—me, an old man! You don't even say, 'The Lord Jesus be praised! Where are you going to?'"

"Away out into the world"

"Away out into the world? Because of that wedding? Didn't I tell you, 'Beware, for she'll eat you?' And she has eaten you, too."

"God be with you!"

"God guide you! . . . There—she's eaten you—that wench has eaten you. But Mat'll know how to deal with her. I took a good look at him. A splendid man! For her a sort of breeche's strap is needed and not a fiddlestring and bow. You're soft"

"God be with you!"

"And with you! Don't be downcast. Perhaps the Lord Jesus saved you from her, for she'd have killed you"

Jasiek was already going down the high road and old Gonsiorek muttered

"How dreadfully stupid a man can get through a woman! And he seemed to be a fine lad, sensible and handy at everything, at sawing and with horses and at the mill,

and as for playing, he knew it all down to Amen! And *that* made such a hash of him! Love!"

But Jasiek Mosienzny, called the Musician, was passing through forests and woods on his way towards Hungary, and was saying to himself

"Oh, fool, fool that I was! Oh, fool, fool!"

And then

"What kind of a spirit is in me? Truly I wonder at it myself. What I don't want pushes itself into my grasp. What I want is not for me, and what ought to be mine I can't catch, can't get hold of! Am I bewitched? I couldn't get Marysia of Chocholov, I wasted myself finely over her—and this one, whom I could have had, I missed! There! Perhaps it was the fiddle that bewitched me. Maybe it's that that has led to me waste my life, maybe it's that that has softened my soul so that a wench can say to me 'Your soul is not a man's, but a child's. I've no luck with it, no luck!' Maybe it's that that has laid a charm on me. . . If it weren't for the fiddle she wouldn't have hired me for the horses. It was the talk about me. . . because of the talk."

And such wrath with the fiddle took him that he raised it aloft in his hand, and would have smashed it against a tree-stump. . . But then he remembered that it was all he had in the world. . . The fiddle he had, and nothing more. . . that, and the glory that it made for him on the earth.

And he tuned up, but played not any of his accustomed tunes nor any mournful one. He struck the strings with his bow, so that they all sounded at once and gave forth the Black Danube March

*Dark as pitch is the night—Fire gleams through the trees are falling.*

*Dark as pitch is the night—Hear evil to evil calling!*

*In the clearing beneath the firs a fire in the wood is glowing—*

*Do the wild witch-maidens warm them or devils to hell-fire-going?*

MARYNA

*"Come thou to us, young brother—our lot thou shalt now be sharing,*

*And if thy fate fall so, to the grave thou shalt swift be faring,*

*And if thy fate fall so, bright gold in thy grasp shall shine,*

*And with every day a mistress—a sweetheart fair shall be thine."*

*"Hey, brothers of mine, to share your fate I am flying.*

*Maids in the valleys loved—oh, cease ye your useless crying!*

*Weep not, sisters mine, like flowering apple-trees growing—*

*Weep not, parents grey-headed, over your son that is going!*

*Weep not for me that to steal, to kill I go—*

*My roof the wood and my couch, grass, brushwood low!*

*If gold falls to my lot I will scatter in far and free*

*If the gallows-tree be my fate, why, the wind will play with me."*

Playing thus, he went forwards toward Hungary, and his own heard of him no more.

Some said that he joined the gypsy troupe that wanted to enlist him before. Others said he was drowned in the Vaga, others that he drank himself to death, and still others that he joined a band of robbers somewhere away in the Siedmiogrod mountains. Nobody knew for certain. All that remained of him was his fame and the song that folk sang of him

*Known is Jamcek's fame all over the countryside:*

*Though he is gone forever, yet will it aye abide.*

# THE WINTER MAIDENS

(By K. P. Tetmajer)

MATSYEK was a highland shepherd all his life until ill-health got hold of him. Something went wrong with him inside. Maybe it was from scrambling up the high peaks, and maybe it was a dispensation of Providence—none could tell. His heart was affected. Willy-nilly he had to stop shepherding, since his weakness prevented him from going up into the Tatras. He had to sit at home and potter round his cottage like an old woman—he who, when he went with his flock to the pastures, in June, did not return until the autumn, did not even come down for the harvest. He had been sitting like that for twenty years already, and he was sixty years old.

And then came a day in the month of May, a day so warm that it was more like a day in July. A lovely, scented breeze was coming from the Tatras. Matsyek came out in front of his cottage, looked round and breathed deeply.

“Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!” he exclaimed

He began to walk straight before him. He went on and on, because the lovely, scented breeze from the Tatras lured him. A desire to immerse himself in it, as in water, arose in Matsyek’s heart. One gets into the water when one’s muscles are tired and one’s whole body weak, and soon one feels better.

So Matsyek Scyrbularz went forward, and somehow he was able to walk. He did not feel the terrible pain in the heart which had hindered him from climbing the mountains . . . . How he had cursed and how he had mocked himself! He, a highlander, born in the mountains, he a shepherd of the high peaks, a fine fellow, alert as a shepherd’s dog, he who hadn’t felt himself climbing—he couldn’t go up! He had mocked himself, and cursed, and sometimes wept. Well, not even sometimes, but often did he curse. He would sit down sometimes in a lonely place where he couldn’t be seen

## THE WINTER MAIDENS

by anybody, and he would weep just terribly. Up there above, the sheep were moving towards a steep rock, the chamois were skipping over moving stones, a dog was rounding up the sheep, barking at them, and he, first among the shepherds, was sticking at home!

His neighbors teased him a good deal, too. Very few noticed that he was ill. They just called him "gaffer" and scorned him. It's in human nature to scorn the weaker. The blind, the lame and the weak, like the poor, do not evoke pure pity, but a kind of hurtful, pitying scorn.

So it was with Matsyek.

He had nobody to complain to. . . to complain to somebody always brings relief. In the first place he had neither wife nor children—and then his dog, Singer, had died of old age long ago. This dog, Singer, who had grazed sheep with him for twelve years, went shepherding with Stas Cudzikowy for another year, but then it couldn't climb, for it began to lose the use of its back legs. So Cudzik brought the dog to Matsyek, and it stayed another two years with him, until it was fifteen. It looked up at Matsyek, as it lay at his feet, with its dim eyes, and Matsyek smoked a pipe, sat on the bench and talked.

Various things he said, and sometimes he cried over the dog.

Folk laughed at it and pitied him, and sometimes they came up on purpose to listen.

"Listen, listen," said they, "Matsyek's talking to the dog."

"Wait and see if the dog'll answer him."

But the dog made no answer, only listened, while Matsyek went on talking and talking. . .

"Singer, old boy, do you remember when we were benighted with the sheep on High Green Rock? Goodness me! Jarka fell down and was killed. We couldn't get down, for the darkness came on so suddenly. . . . Do you remember when the wolf got at you? . . . it was somewhere about Michaelmas, or at the end of October, in the autumn. We had started down, towards home. Wouldn't that wolf



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have given it to you, if the spikes round your neck hadn't saved you? What a wolf it was! Not often does one come across such. You were never a weak one, were you, Singer lad? Singer, how was it when we were hauling manure on sledges, and an avalanche overtook us? The snow covered the horse and the sledge . . . down it came, all of a sudden, and even the big forest near the top of the mountain couldn't stop it. Lord, how it crashed down! If it weren't for you, Singer, I shouldn't be here today. I'd fainted, and I should certainly have died. But you warmed me and kept waking me, and I pulled myself together, and somehow dragged myself home. I got home without the manure or the sledges or the horse, to be sure—but I was young and I soon got over it.

"Singer, do you remember when Jan Zatrementsyanski came to steal sheep on our meadows? He was a fellow! You wouldn't find one like him either on this side of the Tatra or on the other. That was a fight! You woke and barked. I ran towards the grazing grounds with my brother Jendrek and Walek Mardula. They came on twice, the same in number as we were. If it hadn't been for you and the other dog, Bystra, we couldn't have beaten them. They were terrible, furious fellows. I still have a hollow place in my head, where they banged me with a piece of rock."

Singer would listen and gaze at Matsyek with his dim eyes. . . . So long as the dog lived it wasn't too bad for Matsyek, but when he died Matsyek had nobody to talk to. Matsyek didn't want to talk about the mountains with other highland shepherds, now as old as himself, or with the new, the younger ones. Nay, he even avoided such converse and shut himself up in his cottage. . . . Afterwards men heard cursing and weeping. So obstinate did Matsyek become, that he wouldn't even ride up towards the mountains on the horse which he still kept. "If not, then not! If the Almighty doesn't want me to go up into the mountains, I won't go. Maybe I'll go after death!"

But never had there been such a sweet-scented breeze from the Tatra. Matsyek just went forward, not even staying to shut the door of his cottage. He entered the forest, which wasn't far from his cottage, and came across a spring, with

## THE WINTER MAIDENS

clear, swiftly-flowing water. Matsyek drank from it, and the water was as cold as ice. Something strange happened in him after this drink. It was as if everything turned to ice inside his head. Something bright and clear and glorious filled it. Did the sun get inside his head, or what was it, he wondered.

His heart didn't ache and he went on, though he hadn't been able to climb for twenty years. Everything became extraordinarily clear to him. Everything round him—every blade of grass, every little branch became quite clear and distinct. "It's as if somebody had put stars into my head instead of eyes," he said to himself.

It was noon when he left the forest behind him. Already he could see enormous slabs of rock, covered with lichen, and firs on the mountain ridge. Higher up was a sort of little meadow, intersected by a torrent. Enormous rocks lay near the torrent. When Matsyek touched them he felt that they were hot from the sun. He lay down on a rock with his face towards it, and began to hug and to kiss it. His tears fell in torrent on the rock, which had lain there since ages ago, it had been torn down from a peak. Matsyek lost himself completely. Twenty years of yearning and grief bound him to that rock.

It had all come back again, again! That twenty years of longing, sickness and bondage had never been. . . Matsyek Scyrbularz had never been called "gaffer," he had never ceased to herd sheep, to climb amid the rocks. . . He had never sat in his cottage in the village, in the valley, whilst others frolicked with the spring, he had never lamented over himself, he had never wept or complained in his sad, afflicted soul. . . Singer had never lain at his feet, weak, powerless like himself. . . It had all been a terrible, painful, weary dream. . . .

Then he turned his face towards the sky and stretched his arms out wide. . . .

Above him were the immense rocks, white with snow or black where the snow had melted and—the sky, the blue, lovely sky, full of light and of white, light, feathery clouds and mist. . . .

God's own miracle!

Matsyek got up from the rock and drank from the mountain spring, and his mind and his sight became yet clearer

"I see twice as much as before," he thought

It was a strange sight that he saw, that old fellow!

Andrysh Michna had told him in his youth (Andrysh had been nearly a hundred years old then) of the winter maidens, whom his uncle, Simon Michna Pietrowski, had once seen in the mountains when he had gone up to look if the snow had melted, and whether it was time to drive up the flocks

Andrysh Michna had been a young boy when his uncle Johym had told him this story .

The winter maidens fly with the wind, with the snow-clouds that fly up from that sea which is far away there, and never is free from ice. They are as white as snow, their faces are white, their mouths are white, but their eyes shine like the hoar-frost at dawn, and their hair is all silvered. They have long, white dresses that cling round their bodies like autumn cobweb clings sometimes to the branches of a young fir. When they come down on the Tatra with the clouds (and they generally come on a moonlight night when the moon is full), they at once take hands and begin to dance in a great circle on the mountain meadows, on the rocks, in the valleys and on the frozen lakes, just as they danced on the ice of the sea. He that sees them will not run away. He that looks hard at them will have no good of it. They will charm him so that he will either fall and kill himself or he will go blind, or he will break his leg and never go up into the mountains again. They do not keep in one place, but they fly with the wind over crags and abysses, from valley to valley, sometimes separating into little groups, sometimes sweeping along in a great company. When there are so many of them all together, they dazzle the eyes of him who sees them. They circle right round the Little Pond and the Five Ponds, too. Sometimes it is as if the wind tore one of them out of the ring, and she flies upwards, flutters about in the air, and again comes down and joins the ring.

## THE WINTER MAIDENS

Thus they frolic about in the mountains until the spring. They sleep when they want to amid the crags, wherever it is coldest, and they eat the ice round the waterfalls, on which the sun shines. Thus the sun prepares their food for them. When the snows begin to melt, they take to the wind and fly out towards the sea.

These winter maidens came into being thus, as very old folk relate. Somewhere in the shadow of the mountains there was a convent, but nobody knows now where it was. There were sixty nuns in it, and a plague killed them all in one day and in one hour of that day. Now they were very holy. An angel was flying by, carrying a sack made of that same webbing as the web that one sees on grass in autumn at dawn, that weaves itself, for it is the linen of the angels. The angel was carrying an orphan's prayer to heaven, and he'd got weary for the orphan had prayed for a long time. He flew along, and there he saw sixty white souls waiting to be carried to heaven by angels—a whole flock of them like sheep, "Dear, dear," thought the angel, "how can I let the poor things freeze" (it was winter). "Wait I'll take them to heaven." But what was he to take them in? There were sacks enough in the convent, but they wouldn't all fit into one. In the chapel, however, there was a banner of the Holy Virgin, and the angel made haste to take it. He tied it up as well as he could in haste, put the souls into it, and threw it over his right shoulder and flew off. He flew on and on until he came to the Tatra. Then he felt tired with his heavy burden, for there were so many souls and that orphan had cried as she prayed, and her tears were as heavy as lead. It was night, the moon was almost hidden behind the peaks, and the clouds were dark and full of snow. "What shall I do?" said the angel to himself. "I can't pass the night in the mountains, for it's cold and a snow storm's coming. That wouldn't do. If I fly slowly I freeze to the marrow of my bones, and I'll lose my way in the dim light, for the mountains are big and terrible. If I sit down under a rock, it'll be bitter towards morning, and besides I might fall asleep, and one of the sacks might roll down into the valley. But supposing," said the angel, "I left one behind, it'll be lighter on my shoulder, and I'll fly quickly, and as

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

soon as I get past the mountains, it'll be all right and tight. I'll stow one sack somewhere by a rock and come and fetch it tomorrow. But which shall I leave? Shall I leave the souls of the dead nuns, or the orphan's prayer? If I leave the souls, won't they be disgruntled that I don't take them to heaven at once? If I leave the prayers, maybe the devil, who's always on the lookout, will undo the sack and scatter them like pearls all over the valley—and to gather them up it'll take two days or three. You mayn't lose even one orphan's prayer, you have to bring them all up to the Lord God in order, for they're holy things."

He scratched his head, for he didn't know what to do. But he thought and thought, at last he decided thus. As for the souls, a day of eternity more or less meant nothing at all. But with the orphan's prayers it was another story. If they weren't brought straight away to the Lord, He would, even though it was in the middle of the night, go fussing round finely in the office, for the stars keep shining behind the clouds, and besides He's old and doesn't sleep well now. "And if the Lord gets angry with me and won't help me, who will? Those prayers come from a sorrowful heart, for they're very heavy. I'll leave the souls. The devil won't come at them, for Our Lady's banner's about them."

So he took the banner with the souls from off his shoulder, and hid it in a crevice under a rock. Then he rose up high with the other sack, and the moon still shone a little, and he got up to heaven by the milky way, flying fast and straight, for he knew the road well.

But he never thought of the thing that happened. The devil is always on the lookout. As soon as the angel had left the banner with the souls and flown away, he said to the wind—for they're boon companions—"Oh, my dear fellow, couldn't you play some kind of a trick on the angel? He left those souls in a crevice under the rock, couldn't you let them out? As they're tied up in a holy banner it isn't easy for me to get at them, but you can. Fly along quickly, and let them out for me. I (so he said) have no right to them, but let the angel search for them a little."

At that the wind flew and blew with all its might. At

## THE WINTER MAIDENS

once the banner came undone and the souls flew out all over the place. They flew one after the other, like doves out of a cote. Far and wide they flew. The wind wondered that there was such a flock of them, but the devil only grinned, struck sparks out of the rocks with his horns, and went off with himself. Down to the earth he went.

The wind marvelled and made off towards the frozen sea, for spring was already on the way and it was a winter wind. But the souls cried after him. Since you were so good as to set us free from that crevice, where we were cramped a bit, we'd rather go with you, so take us with you. We'll dance for you so that you won't weary on the way. It isn't any wonder that they wanted to dance, for they were young girls, though they were nuns, and one can't dance in a convent. There was nothing to pray for, since they were already dead, and what one prays for is a good death. The wind took them, and ran off with them towards the frozen sea.

As soon as dawn came the next day the angel came. He found the banner, but not the souls. "Confound it all, how the devil did you get undone?" said he to the banner. "How am I to find those souls?" He flew about among the peaks. God help him, he found nothing. He scratched his head. He cursed, and he thought "If they've gone, they've gone — 'tis as they wished it. I'll put the banner back where it was, nobody saw me take it yesterday for 'twas dark, and nobody's been out yet today, for it's very early, and nobody will know what happened. I'll hang it up where it was before, and there's an end of it. I won't bother about the souls any more. Let anybody that finds them herd them together, and take them to heaven."

He flew off well pleased, for the souls were heavy and he wasn't used to carrying heavy weights. It's only once in a thousand times that an angel has to carry so many souls, and he'd never been ordered out to a war as yet, for he was a young angel and so had only been on duty round about villages.

So those souls turned into the winter maidens

There, where the winter wind flew, they flew with it.

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

They were terribly homesick on the frozen sea, and so they flew towards the mountains in autumn, but when the spring was at hand they went back again with the wind to the sea, for the wind was their guardian and they didn't want to separate from it. The wind was pleased and they were pleased. The wind played and they danced. But heaven forbid that anybody should look at them. At once they avenged themselves.

It was these winter maidens that Matsyek Scyrbularz saw before him.

That was at the Five Polish Lakes, towards the west. Matsyek had climbed up on to the bank of the Great Lake, from Roztoka, near the Great Waterfall. The lake was frozen and the winter maidens were dancing on it in a ring.

Matsyek was terribly frightened and wanted to retreat, so that they shouldn't see him, for he knew what threatened him. But he was sorry, for it was a sheer marvel to look at. The ice, already thin, became green and red and gold in the sun, and they, too, gleamed red and gold and green by turns. He stood staring.

But they didn't see him, they just danced in a ring.

Then suddenly old mother Nature got the better of Matsyek Scyrbularz. He'd been a dancer in his youth, he'd loved it. He'd danced after the girl who partnered him like a cock after a hen, bending from time to time and clapping his hand on the floor . . . His dancing had been ended when his climbing had come to an end. But how he had loved it! Once he had heard the music his feet danced of themselves. Then afterwards when he heard music a lump would rise in his throat, for he couldn't even dance a few steps.

How he had been used to dance here at the Five Lakes!

His eyes became so clear-sighted that he saw almost every stone on the crags in Woloszyn. His light sandals had danced all over those rocky slopes as he followed the sheep. They had danced to music and without music, to that pipes or without them. He danced at Opalone, he danced at Krzyżne, at Walentowa, under the walls of Liptow, above the Lakes, near the Kolo on the Spiglas Ridge. . . . When he

## THE WINTER MAIDENS

whistled as the shepherds do, the whole valley re-echoed to it.

*Hundred and two, hundred and three . .*

*The shepherd stands 'neath the fir tree,*

*Sheep of his have strayed away*

*In the dusk of dying day*

Hey, his old nature got the better of him! Before you could say a word he was within the ring of the winter maidens, and had joined hands with them

And on the green and golden mirror of the lake, beneath which, as all knew, there was a terrible abyss of water, stood Matsyek with floating gray hair, and he stamped and whistled, while the winter maidens rushed round and round like a cloud in a mountain gorge, whirled about by the wind.

Suddenly the wind blew hard and howled. The winter maidens were blown together in confusion, they melted together into a cloud and rose up into the air above the Deserted Valley, going towards Zawrat, towards the north. There was a gleam, it grew white, faded and disappeared as at a spell

Matsyek remained alone on the Great Lake, on the ice.

A terrible, piercing, penetrating pain shot through his heart. Matsyek shrank and bent down. So, great a weakness came over him that he lay down on the ice.

"Yet once more I've seen the mountains, and once more I have danced. Come quickly now, dear death!"





# ZWYRTALA THE FIDDLER

(by K. P. Tetmajer)

OLD Zwyrtala died and his soul set out to heaven,  
moustached and with a fiddle under him arm.

He got to the gate and looked it was shut.

He thought to himself "Better not bang at the gate;  
they're asleep"

He sat down on a stump near by . . . sat and sat but  
pretty soon he wearied of it, took out the fiddle, tightened  
its pegs with his teeth, strummed on its strings, leant it under  
his left arm and drew the bow across

He played softly at first, fearing to wake them, but,  
warming to his playing, he pressed harder on the bow. Playing  
there, he called to mind his old woman, who'd stayed  
behind on the earth and, at the thought, immediately began  
to sing

*May the bachelor's abode ever blessed be!*

*Everywhere I look around, there my wife I see*

As he sang—and he sang loud—he heard a voice from  
behind the gate saying

"Who's that there?"

"Saint Peter!" thought Zwyrtala to himself, but he answered  
boldly, for in Empress Tessa's time he'd been pressed  
and had served in the cuirassiers for twelve years over there.

"It's I."

"And who's I?"

"Zwyrtala."

"What're you yelling for?"

"I'm not yelling at all, only singing."

"To the dev—" (the voice broke off) "with such singing.  
Why ever did you come so late?"

"Right enough, I'm a bit late, but I only died towards  
evening."

"Towards evening? Then you should be but half way here!"

"Well, Saint Peter, I'm brisk—I'm a highlandman."

"Then where d'you hail from?"

"From the mountains."

"From Novy Targ?"

"Yes."

"And from what village?"

"Oh, if I tell you you'll be none the wiser. You don't know the country over there, do you?"

"I know everything Where d'you come from?"

"From Mur."

"What's your name?"

"Matsyek Galitsa "

"And your nickname?"

"Zwyrtala "

"And your place?"

"Sentzek."

"Well then, sit there, Sentzek, till daybreak . . . and don't make a noise."

"All right, I won't. Good night to you, sir."

"There, there! Quiet!"

"Matsyek Zwyrtala sat there quietly for a while, but it got a bit cold towards morning, though 'twas midsummer and again he strummed on the strings.

Lo and behold, a little head—one, two, three little heads showed over the gate!

They were little angels' heads.

"Ow! Ow!" said one of them. "How nicely he plays!"

"When Zwyrtala heard that he brought his bow down hard on the strings—on all four at once—and out came a march:

POLISH SHORT STORIES

*Oh, the Magyar drinks, the Magyar pays!*

"Oh, how beautiful, how lovely!" cried the little angels.  
"What sort of a tune is that?"

"That's a bit of robber music "

"A bit of robber music—a bit of robber music," the little angels began to repeat, and they clapped their hands.  
"Oh, how lovely!"

Suddenly the key grated in the lock and the gate opened wide the gatekeeper of heaven, Saint Peter, appeared in it.

"Zwyrta!"

"Here I am "

"Come along in "

"No need to ask twice into heaven "

But in a flash the news was all over heaven that a high-landman who played the fiddle had come, and it came to the Lord God's own ears as, having risen early, He sat before His porch, smoking a pipe. He was doing no work, for it was a Sunday

Zwyrta had'nt yet been given quarters when an angel came up, but not a little one this time in a little, white shirt and white wings, but a big one, in silver armor with a flaming sword at his side and rainbow wings, and he said

"Zwyrta!"

"Here!"

"Is it true that you can play?"

"It's true.

"The robbers' dance?"

"Aye."

"Would you play it?"

"Why not? To whom?"

"To the Lord God himself!"

Zwyrta scratched the back of his ear but only once. He was a Galitsa and the Galitsas were all bold fellows.

## ZWYRTALA THE FIDDLER

"I'll play it."

"Then come along!" said the angel, speaking with a highland accent.

"Would you kindly tell me, sir, if you were ever in the mountains?"

"I was," said the angel.

"But when? Excuse me, sir, for my boldness in asking you."

"When the Poles fought the Tartars in the Koscieliska Valley I was there to help them."

Zwyrtała looked incredulously at the angel. He was young—not more than twenty

The angel laughed, for he understood Zwyrtała thinking that way

"We don't get old here, in heaven," said he.

Zwyrtała got ashamed and answered "Don't wonder, Sir. Could one take in everything in heaven at once? On earth we don't understand everything and how could I here."

"Well, come on!" said the angel, and went in front.

He went along a street—a wide one (Ludzińska Street in Nowy Targ was nothing to it, why, nothing at all!). There were silver houses on both sides of it, where the saints dwelt. Then they came to a golden one, and before it, sitting in the porch, was the Lord God Himself! He was smoking a pipe

Zwyrtała made his best bow and the Lord God nodded to him.

Round about were angels—small ones, big ones, archangels in golden armor, men and women saints and those others that are in heaven, men and women—heaps of women! They'd run from all sides to hear the music! 'Twas a wonder how they hustled to get in front, those souls!

"Now then!" said the Lord God, "Zwyrtała, play!"

And Zwyrtała bowed himself again before the Lord God and said

"I most humbly bow to Your Grace, mighty, all-powerful Lord! Does anyone happen to know if there are any young men from Podhale here in heaven?"

"What for?"

"Because one plays better when they dance."

The Lord God laughed and made a sign to the angels. Two of them flew off but came back with nothing.

"There are a few from Podhale, but they're old," reported one.

"That's no use," said Zwyrtała. "How could an old man dance! And where are the young ones?" For sometimes young men, too, die!"

Then Saint George said "You'd have to seek them in purgatory"

"True enough! You say well, young sir. In purgatory! said Zwyrtała "That's where they'd be—lots of them!" I know them! Jasiek Mardula, that Brzenk of Lysintsa killed because of Bronka Horani, or Franek Macey—they hanged him in Mikulas. Just finely he robbed and set fire to four inns in Luptov; but maybe he's in hell? Or there was Mayertsik, Peter Mayertsik's son who was killed by a cart with ore in it in the Skupniow clearing—he was terribly fond of fighting—oh, if he came here! There wasn't such a dancer in a hundred villages round."

But the Lord God made a sign with his hand.

"Play!" He said.

"What tune?"

"The robbers' dance."

"Here goes, then, the robbers' dance."

Zwyrtała tightened the pegs with his teeth, tuned up, drew his bow across the strings and played it right through, beginning with

## ZWYRTALA THE FIDDLER

*Oh, Janitzek, heart of mine,  
Where's the feather that was thine—  
Given by me?*

*Dearest, when to war I rode,  
Fell it where the river flowed  
Full and free.*

continuing through

*Oh, chief of ours, chief of ours,  
Good robber-boys hast thou, by all the power!*

and so on down to

*For here the robbers dance so gay  
He played everything down to Amen*

The Lord God nodded His head. He liked it. Then the saints and angels followed suit and the saved too, nay, even, I may say, they couldn't praise Zwyrta's playing enough! And he was most awfully glad and his moustaches bristled.

Well, but listen what happened afterwards. The Lord God went into His dwelling and then the men and women saints and the angels kept saying to Zwyrta "Play! Play!"

And Zwyrta made no reply, but started the Mientushanski tune at once

*When among the meadows I do gaily sing  
'Tis as if the organ in the church did ring.*

And they all cried out "Oh, how lovely, oh, how beautiful!"

Thus did Zwyrta play and sing and what do you think happened!

Saint Joseph, the foster-father of the Lord Jesus, was crossing heaven when he heard a soul singing (some girl's soul it was)

*When I was a little one, only twelve months old,  
To me came there singing all the boys so hold.*

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

Saint Joseph listened, and he hadn't heard it out when, from another side there came a voice that sounded like a man's

*Maiden if though were not of our clan and race  
I'd have killed the fellow that looked upon thy face.*

And Saint Joseph hadn't heard that well through, when lo and behold! from yet another side came an angel's tenor, so loud and strong that it thundered through heaven

*Strike, oh Lord, that shepherded dallying with maid.  
While his flock, uncared for, through the peaks have  
strayed.*

Saint Joseph caught his head on both hands!

"My hundred forefathers, whatever's that? he said

He ran towards Saint Peter and there, in the very place where saved souls are supposed to be learning angelic hymns, there wasn't archangel Gabriel standing with his golden baton and his trumpet, but Zwyrtala, sitting on a chair and fiddling, and round about him men and women souls and angels sang, already fairly correctly in chorus

*Homeward lies our way now—dark night's here.  
May it not be for us—void of cheer.  
'Mid Hungarian nobles—wealth untold,  
For our hands since we are—strong and bold.*

"Lord Jesus Christ!" cried Saint Joseph and hastened on, faster still, to Saint Peter "Whatever's up here?"

Just that very moment the archangel Gabriel came up to him and said that nobody in heaven wanted to sing any way except to a highland tune, not even Saint Cecilia!

"Zwyrtala's teaching them," he said "It's something extraordinary. They were to have learned new hymns—tomorrow's Our Lady's festival—and none of them knows anything."

Night came and found them still listening. From every side highland tunes sounded. All heaven reechoed with them.

## ZWYRTALA THE FIDDLER

In the morning Saint Peter said to archangel Gabriel  
"This can't go on. Couldn't you call up this Zwyrta, Sir?"

"All right, then!"

Zwyrta came with his fiddle under his arm

He bowed.

"Zwyrta!" said Saint Peter "Would you go away somewhere?"

"Out of this?"

"Yes "

"Away from heaven?"

"Just so "

"But where?"

"Where?" repeated Saint Peter. "Where? That's just what I don't know "

And he fell a-thinking

"And why should I?" asked Zwyrta. "Why, they sent me here when I died."

"That's just it "

"I didn't steal or kill or fight."

"I know, I know!"

"Well then what?"

"But everyone in heaven's been singing highland songs since you've come."

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

"Zwyrta!" said Saint Peter (then he paused) "Where can he go from heaven?"

But Zwyrta kept silent a moment, scratched the back of his ear and then said. "Oh, please Your Grace, don't make your head ache over that! I agree on the spot I'm off"

"Where to?"

"To where I came from "



"To the earth?"

"Just that "

"And I thought of putting you on some stair . "

"I don't want it You needn't look for any stair I'm off down there."

"Out of heaven?"

"Oh, I'll find heaven there too! I'll go through the woods and the valleys, playing I'll see to it that the old tunes aren't forgotten When a boy sits by the sheep with his fiddle I'll play to him softly from behind a crag When a girl sings by her cows in a mountain meadow, I'll help her When the old highlandmen go to cut wood in the forest, I'll make sound in their ears the songs their fathers knew "

"And, if none be there, there'll be water in the torrents and frozen lakes, when the wind whistles over the ice. There'll be the forest—I shan't weary there or cry for heaven . While I yet lived I often asked the Lord God to let me, after death, stay forever in the mountains I want no other heaven, I wouldn't change the mountains for seven heavens "

'Well, then Zwyrtala, go! for you'd make us all highlandmen here in heaven . . And you won't feel wronged ?'

But Zwyrtala raised his fiddle quite up to his head in salute.

"Where my heart is, is heaven," said he

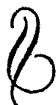
And he made his best bow and went out at heaven's gate, down the high road towards the earth—it was night He went down the Milky Way, his fiddle under his arm, and when he felt himself once more in freedom he cried aloud, "Hui Ha!" and lifted his bow high and struck up

*Come I from the mountains where the torrents leap—  
Where the rain has bathed me, wind has rocked to sleep.  
Krzywan, Krzywan, Krzywan, why art dreaming so?  
Has the white snow clothed thee, doth thy wild wind  
blow?*

## ZWYRTALA THE FIDDLER

*Wild goats of the mountains, whither lies your way?  
In the Feather Valley, there the wild goats stay.  
Janitzek, Janitzek, thunder bears thy name.  
Through a hundred valleys echoes loud thy fame.  
'Tis no shame, a robber in a mountain race.  
A robber sits in heaven, in the formost place*

And Zwyrtała went forward, down the Milky Way,  
singing as he went, till he reached the rocky paths in the  
peaks and on further, into the depths of the Tatra



# 2 TEMPTATION 2

(by Piotr Choynowski)

AT the mature age of eleven—that is, in the flower of manhood—I was a diligent student in my second year at high school. To this ripe maturity must be attributed the fact that, although these studies took place on the very borders of Asia, I, a native of Russian Poland, perceived nothing extraordinary in my situation. Three years earlier I had been sent off like a postal package straight to my uncle, the doctor of a district in this southeastern province of Russia, with the idea that I should “develop in the fresh air,” that it would cost “next to nothing,” but above all because “there it is easier with the schools than with us.” And truly, there was more air in that province than in all Belgium and Holland put together, and with the schools it was ridiculously easy. Nevertheless, as the low-grade technical school in my uncle’s district was recognized there as the supreme temple of learning, I was in due time conducted by my aunt to the high school of the province, which was a hundred and twenty-five miles distant by coach, and after undergoing with success the necessary examinations I was established as a boarder with the widow of a major and her two daughters. At this point my aunt took leave of me, shaking an admonitory finger at me with the words: “Now, mind you study hard, you little rascal!”

And that is about all. At any rate, that is how my own history presented itself to me. I felt no surprise that in the whole town there was only one Polish family (which, as it had been strongly recommended to me by my aunt, I of course carefully avoided), I found nothing extraordinary in the fact that, together with Wilford, an English boy (whose father was building a railway in the province), and Keller, the fat German, I was looked upon by the whole school as the representative of an extremely outlandish nation, while several grown-up Kirghiz, my school-fellows, although Asiatics, were regarded as natives. I found it quite natural that Mehmet Khan, one of these natives, who boarded at

## TEMPTATION

the school, escaped one night on a stolen horse, for which crime he was expelled, I found it quite natural, when the bitter frosts of the steps arrived suddenly after the October rains, to skate my way to school through the streets of the town.

Nothing, at that period of my life, surprised me. I "developed in the fresh air," and studied hard as a matter of course, and if at times I recalled the last scene of parting at the railway-station in Warsaw, my mother's tears, and the exhortation of all my aunts and cousins, and more especially of my grandmother "Never forget that you are a Pole!" it was almost invariably during some scrimmage with my school-mates, when I was struggling to uphold a reputation of Polish courage. Not in vain had Miss Natalia the governess imported by my uncle from Poland, nourished me on knightly traditions. I knew how to give somebody a bloody nose, and how to hit the soft spot under the heart. Never, even when I was down, would I surrender, I fought with such obstinate passion that even my critical schoolmate the biggest dunce and the hottest head in the class, would sometimes condescend to say, fingering his upper lip "Hm, not bad, little spitfire, but not enough strength." To the whole school, both students and professors, I was known as the "spitfire Pole," and this name represented my title to respect. In my leisure time I collected stamps and read novels, and for all the holidays I returned, of course, to my uncle's, always to my great joy.

This idyllic existence lapsed about a year and a half. And then, soon after Christmas, I was visited by a great misfortune a magnificent officer, a Captain of the Lancers, a cousin of the widow, arrived to take up his abode with us. From the first moment we were at daggers drawn. The Captain, moustached and imposing, sprawling on the sofa with a guitar in his enormous paws, with a sly wink at his cousins, at once began his inquisition.

"Hi, you! Come here. What's this? They tell me you are the 'spitfire Pole'."

"Well, so I am," I proudly replied.

"Fancy now? But how can you be a Pole? There are no Poles."

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

"No Poles! What do you mean? But there are"

"There are none now. Poles there were in Warsaw, before we caught the poor fools napping"

At school, my reply to such an affirmation would have been the famous punch under the heart, but it was another matter to tackle a grown man. So, with a shrug, I took myself off. But the insulting words stuck in my throat.

The next day, no sooner had I sat down to dinner than the Captain returned to the attack.

"Well, will you acknowledge now that you are a Russian?"

"Why should I?" I answered with a scowl. "I am a Pole."

"Dear me, what obstinacy! But we were saying only yesterday that Warsaw now belongs to Russia."

I was beside myself with fury, but, affecting a proud indifference, I retorted:

"Even if it does belong to Russia now, it will be ours again some day."

"What nonsense! How can that be?"

"Well, it will be, that's all."

"What, you silly brat? And, pray, how will you take it? By force?"

"Yes, by force. Why not?"

"Mind what you're saying! Who'll take it? You, you little whipper-snapper?"

"Yes, I. Why not?"

"D'you know what you're saying? That means revolt. It's as much as your life is worth to talk like that."

"Oh revolt or not, we shall get it back."

That was too much for him. Noisily pushing back his chair, he came close up to me and, shaking his fist in my face, he hissed:

## TEMPTATION

"You, you . . . Never you dare to say such things to me—to me, an officer of the Guards! D'you understand?"

And he left the room with a frightful clanking of his spurs, to the dismay of the widow and her daughters.

This pyrrhic victory was my first and last. The big Captain changed his tactics completely. Instead of attacking me openly, he adopted a system of sly pin-pricking, constant and painful, with stealthy, sneering, insulting allusions to Poland and the Poles. I made no reply in such subtleties I was no match for him. But his persecution aroused in me a vague resentment toward my own nation, a nation I found it so difficult to defend, and at the same time a violent hatred for the Captain. The worst was when he concealed his malice behind a veil of diplomacy, playing the role of a man full of indulgence and good intentions, desirous of rectifying the blind errors of a child. He would preach to me about Polish disorder, about oppression by the Jesuits—lessons he had been sedulously taught as a cadet, he would explain that a nation without an army is nothing but a band of civilians that a handful of soldiers could disperse. Picking his way carefully, stealthily, he would come out at last with a song very popular in the Russian army, to the effect that the Polish insurgents ran away from the enemy with the swiftness of hares. In vain did I protest with tears in my eyes that in 1863 my grandfather was killed in the battle of Miechow, that in 1831 my great-grandfather twice led his regiment to the attack, that in the seventeenth century one of my ancestors was with Sapieha in Moscow. His scornful reply was always the same: a regiment of dragoons had so and so many swords, a regiment of infantry so and so many rifles, a brigade so and so many cannon. And after all, he asked, was I so badly off in Russia? Was I wronged in any way? Did not my uncle, who occupied a governmental position, faithfully serve the Czar? Oh, it was no easy task for a little boy to defend a whole nation! Not that I hesitated, not that my patriotism was undermined, but I had once for all decided to avoid political discussions.

Towards Easter the situation became intolerable. When the first day of school holidays arrived, and I saw my uncle's old Tartar coachman, Muzla, driving through the gate, I

rushed out to him, and in the very middle of the yard threw of my arms round his neck with no thought of my own dignity nor of his snow-covered sheepskin coat. Sweet as a choir of angels sounded to my ears the hoarse voice of good old Muzla

"Now, young master, we must be off!"

Oh, the happiness to children of such returns! My own warm, comfortable bed, fresh and fragrant, by the besides the neatly folded garments, put there by solicitous hands; the table, old and intimate friend of childhood, witness of work and play, with its hacked and disfigured edges, the enormous wardrobe that always creaked as though with surprise, the big, cracked mirror, and the gay, playful rays of the morning sun—all the joy of awakening to the old, familiar surroundings! I shared the room with my little cousin Wicek, whose bed was in another corner. He was still asleep, lying flat on his back with one arm flung out across the pillow, and a queer whistling sound came from his nostrils (he had spent half the day before building bridges over puddles) Funny little Wicek! From the dining-room came the tinkle of cups. And then suddenly a savage, joyful hunger made itself felt inside me. Heavens! To think of all the delectable dainties set out on the table, waiting to be eaten! With a bound I was out of bed, and spending my surplus energy in hurling pillows at the head of the sleeping Wicek. A little later I cautiously opened the door, modestly hiding my bare, bony legs and, thrusting my head outside, I shouted in a masterful voice, as deep and grown-up as I could make it;

"Nastka, water, please! And hurry up!"

Nastka, the pretty housemaid, was smiling, my aunt was smiling, my uncle was smiling, and Miss Natalia, the governess imported from Poland, was also smiling. My school report was excellent, and all manner of treats were in store for me. My uncle, seeing what fine progress I had made at school, showed me a certain respect. I even had free access to the stable, and every morning I drove up to the porch with Muzla to accompany my uncle on his visits.

How happy I was! Even my aunt, usually grave and

severe, always yearning for Poland, and of whom my uncle himself stood a little in awe—even my aunt was in a splendid humour. Amid the hams, cakes, and suchlike symbols of a "Polish" Eastertide (in the preparation of which my aunt never permitted Agatha, the cook, who was a Russian, to participate), letters from Poland would be read with reverence; and in the twilight hour, hour of sweet melancholy and longing, from the parlour would float the strains of ancient Polish dance-music played by my aunt. In the evening there would be reading aloud, and we would all gather round the table to listen to Mickiewicz's masterpiece, "Pan Tadeuz," or to Sienkiewicz's recently published book, "The Deluge." Ah, those were wonderful times!

And on Ash Wednesday, when we two boys were awakened by the sound of fifes and drums in the street our joy knew no bounds. We rushed to the window in nothing but our shirts, with excited shouts of

"Mother! Aunt! The soldiers are coming!"

Our noses glued to the panes, we recognized at once among the dragoons our friends Sergeant Fronkiewicz and Private Czapla, who were nodding to us. What a din there was, and what joy! My delighted aunt at once sent Nastka to the Captain with an invitation to dinner on Easter day, and the request that he should quarter on us all the Catholics (one dared not say Poles) in his squadron. For in this remote province my aunt and uncle had established the custom of gathering together Polish recruits during the passage of troops garrisoned in the province, were it only for a few days, or even a few hours, as military duty permitted. And it is small wonder that such rustic warriors, seated before a full plate of savoury stew and listening with one ear to the patriotic admonitions of my aunt, thoroughly approved of this custom. The fame of this hospitable house had spread through eastern European and western Asiatic regiments, and it would happen frequently that some Polish soldier, a complete stranger, on his way home to spend his furlough, would call at my uncle's house for a few cordial, friendly words in Polish, and a few roubles to help him on his way. But Fronkiewicz and Czapla were special friends



They passed through the province several times a year, and Fronkiewicz, a native of Warsaw, at once indicated with his fingers the number of days he would be able to spend with us

We children were tremendously impressed by these soldiers. Wicek and I waited with beating hearts at the corner of street for Nastka, who was flirting with Fronkiewicz, and honest Czapla, plodding along a few steps behind them, nodded and smiled to us, and unbuckled his heavy sword to deliver it into our impatient hands

Good old Czapla! He always greeted my aunt in the old-fashioned Polish way, bending to clasp her knees, while the elegant Fronkiewicz bowed and kissed her hand, at the same time stealing a sly glance at Nastka and at the table. Their coming created additional movement and gaiety, and made us children happier than ever. Czapla, as soon as he had finished his meal, went off to inspect things in the stable—to the dismay of old Muzla, the adroit Fronkiewicz, perched on a ladder, busied himself fixing curtain-rods and electric bells, and with a wink and a negligent air promised us for the next day such wonderful bows and arrows as would shoot three Kirghiz at a time.

And when evening came, and we all sat round the table in the light of the big, hanging lamp (I by the side of the bashful Czapla, who was continually catching his spurs in the carpet), and my uncle drank to the health of our guests in order of rank, which led infallibly to the discussion of military matters and the telling of marvellous tales of bygone times—then I felt that in all the world there could be nobody happier than I.

But alas, it happened that I myself unwittingly put an end to this state of beatitude.

It happened, I believe, on Good Friday. Learning from Wicek that my aunt was making cakes, and that he had profited by the occasion to snatch a handful of almonds—which dainty, he declared, he had no intention of sharing with me—I, too, started on a reconnoitring expedition to the kitchen, hopeful of easy loot. With my hands in my

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pockets, and assuming a careless and disinterested air, I lounged around the furious cook and the busy housemaid, my eye on a heap of raisins all cleaned and stoned and ready for use. Unfortunately my aunt was near, engaged in icing cakes. With pretended indifference, and stretching out a wary hand towards the raisins, I looked with innocent eyes at the little stream of snowy icing with which my aunt was tracing the word "Alleluja" on the chocolate surface of the cake. And suddenly, reading this inscription, I forgot all about the raisins. I saw imagination the party during the holidays, the guests—millionaire merchants in the dress of their caste, tipsy dignitaries and their clumsy, uncouth wives—all the local notables with whom it was necessary to cultivate relations. I heard their tiresome questions, always the same, year after year, concerning the meaning of "Alleluja," their stupid comments and conversation on the same subject. I remembered the Captain where I boarded, the torment I had endured, and involuntarily I tugged at my aunt's sleeve.

"Aunt, why do you write that?"

"What? what do you mean?"

"Why do you write 'Alleluja'?"

"It's always written so. Now run away."

"They'll be asking again, and wondering, and talking .?"

"Well, let them. What does it matter? Don't bother me."

"But you can do it another way."

"What do you mean?"

"You can write 'Alleluja' in Russian letters."

My aunt marred her sugary flourishes with a big white blot, and interrupted her work. Looking me straight in the eyes, she asked me in an abrupt, cutting voice

"What is it you said? Repeat it!"

My blood ran cold under that fixed look, but I repeated, stuttering

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

"In Russian letters—'Alleluja' It has the same meaning."

My aunt's face suddenly became very red. My eyes fell, and, terrified, I heard a dry, stifled voice command

"Go away! Get out of my sight!"

I left the kitchen. That moment marked the end of all my joy.

At first I was not even conscious of the heinous nature of my crime. Whistling, my hands in my pockets, skipping over all the puddles around the house, I felt pretty sure that it would all come right, that my aunt would relent. After all, who was right? Did not "Alleluja," even written in Russian letters, mean exactly the same as "Alleluja"? Was it not more sensible to write it in Russian, thus avoiding the necessity of translating it to everybody in turn? These arguments tranquillized me to such an extent that I climbed on the kitchen roof, whence I bombarded the mastiff in the neighbouring yard until he became hoarse with helpless fury.

But when Nastka served me my dinner in the bedroom I saw that matters were serious. And later on there were echoes of a lively discussion in my uncle's study. I heard the angry voices of my aunt and Miss Natalia, and the timid protests of my uncle. "Helen, you exaggerate. . . Such severity. . ." And then, in sharp, stern tones, my aunt's reproach. "You are always ready to give in for the sake of peace. I'm not even sure if you still think of returning. . ." Ugh! I could see it was a bad business. And when I passed cautiously through the study, keeping close to the wall, my aunt did not even look at me, Miss Natalia turned her back on me, and my uncle drummed on his desk with nervous fingers.

Thenceforward I was like an outcast from my kind. Nobody looked at me, nobody spoke to me. Once, when I approached my cousin Zosia in the corridor, she drew back quickly murmuring "Mother has forbidden me. . ." I took all my meals alone, Nastka waited on me with cold indifference. In the evening, with the sound of the merry chatter around the table under the big lamp in my ears, I sat in my

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room alone, reading without interest books already familiar to me. When I asked Fronkiewicz about the bow and arrow he had promised me, he whistled, looked over my head into the kitchen window, and then remarked carelessly that it was holiday-time, and a sin to make bows and arrows, and that . . . well, that there were other reasons, as I should know. . . . And he turned away, with a contemptuous clinking of his spurs. Chubby little Witsek gazed at me in silent awe. Czapla alone did not change his manner toward me. He it was who brought my aunt's orders to me, who the first day of the holidays conducted me to family prayers, which were held to replace to some extent the lack of a church, and who afterwards whispered to me that I was not to show myself among the guests. And all the livelong day, the day anticipated with such delight, I was alone. I dragged myself about like a sleepy fly, careful only to avoid people, to escape from glances cold as ice. I was frightfully unhappy.

Most of my time I spent in the stable. But towards evening, when old Muzla, already muddled with drink, began to smack his lips in true Tartar fashion, shaking his head reproachfully and muttering thickly, "Ay, ay, young master. A bad job, a bad job!" I was seized with savage fury. What did the old idiot know about such things? How could he understand? What business was it of his? I rushed out, slamming the door violently. "If that's how you treat me," I thought bitterly, "I'll just show you!" The next morning, when Nastka answered some question of mine with nothing but a cold glance, I hit out at her blindly, and then hurled after her flying figure brushes, books, boxes—everything within reach. Then I waited to see what would come of it. Half an hour passed—not a sound could I hear. I then deliberately emptied the inkpot on the floor and went out, whistling loudly, arrayed in my very best clothes, although it was pouring with rain. Night was falling when the faithful Czapla found me, a pitiable bedraggled figure, and after rendering the most opportune aid in a bloody battle with street-arabs, persuaded me to return. And again nothing happened. There was no punishment, no remonstrance—as if my very existence was ignored. Furnished with dry ~~nothing~~ by the silent Nastka, under the eyes of my horrified

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cousin Zosia, I helped myself brazenly to a big wedge of cake prepared for the guests, without deigning to give her so much as a glance. I had to go through my uncle's study. My uncle was standing by his desk. Not a word . . . Manfully I continued to devour the cake, scattering crumbs over the fine carpet. And suddenly, just as I was passing by my uncle, I felt the rough but caressing touch of his hand on my hair and face. He said not a word. And I could have sworn, although I saw nothing, that he looked around to make sure that my aunt was not within sight. I, too, remained silent. But at the touch of my uncle's hand my heart melted within me like wax. I sat in my room in the darkness, the big tears rolling down upon the remains of the cake.

That was the end of my revolt. I reconciled myself to the situation and did my best to keep out of everybody's way. As to the cause of my disgrace, I had almost forgotten it, privately considering it of small importance. But I felt resentment toward my aunt. I passed much of my time with Czapla, who not only made for me the bow promised by Fronkiekwicz, but every morning brought me little delicacies "from the table," begging me not to scorn them. And of course I did not. Perched on a trough in the stable, we held long conversations on the good and bad points of horses and on life in the army. We also discussed religious matters in which Czapla was intensely interested. I read to him in Polish the history of Christianity, and he listened with reverence, but I perceived that he understood very little. Sighing deeply, he complained that he had forgotten how it was in his own parish in Poland, where the organ played so beautifully, and that now he was obliged to frequent the Russian Church, and that was a sin.

I consoled him to the best of my ability. Amid Muzla's cries to the horses, swinging my legs from the bunk and with my mouth full of cheese, I spoke with grave dignity.

"That's nothing. It's the same with us students. They make us go to the Russian Church—even us Poles. But only on special occasions, such as the birthdays of members of the Imperial family. It's the law."

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Czapla sighed "But it's a sin all the same"

"No. When we're forced to do it, it's no sin. It's another thing if we go of our own free will, or to learn their religion"

"Their religion? Russian Orthodox?"

"Yes. That would be a terrible sin. They wanted to teach me."

Czapla was horrified.

"Learn their religion? Is it the law?"

"No, there's no law. But they tried it on me. Once the Inspector called me, and told me to go with others, the Russian Orthodox, for the lessons in religion. I told him I was a Catholic. And he said it was all the same, that it was shameful that I should be with the Kirghiz, who were heathens, and that I had better go."

"God save us! And what did you say?"

"I said that if my aunt told me to go, I would go. I knew well that my aunt would never, never consent, because it would be a sin, a mortal sin..."

I made an immense impression on poor Czapla. A few hours later, Nastka, whom the preceding day I had so unmercifully belaboured, came running to me, full of malicious joy, with the message that my aunt wished to see me. I began to feel very queer. I recalled the bombardment of Nastka, the spilled ink, the ruined clothes, the cake—all my crimes rose up before me. I vowed to myself that I would bear everything with stern courage.

Hardly had I entered the study when my aunt called out

"My dear, come here!"

And to my astonishment she took me—me, a student in the second class and a man of valour and weight—on her knee, as she would a child. For a long time I heard nothing but broken, indistinct murmurings and kisses and caresses, a medley of tender reproaches and explanations. "I am always so afraid for you all..." she confessed, wipping the

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tears from her eyes—my severe aunt, who never wept. And presently, sitting side by side, we talked for a long time, seriously, as grown-up people talk. She told me strange tales of turncoats and traitors, people who betrayed their own country, and how deceitful and slippery is the way to a fall, from which only a steadfast, untiring vigilance can save us. My life out of school hours, the Captain's persecution—all was brought to light. Together we discussed the number of rifles in the infantry and the number of swords in the cavalry . . . And finally, I began to eat. With the desire to make up for lost time, I was stuffed with ham and cakes in such quantities that I was ready to burst.

Three months later, but to a new lodging, my grandmother found means to send me a thing hitherto inaccessible to me—a volume of Slowacki's poems, published abroad.

# PEASANT WEDDING

( By W. Reymont )

“ARE you sleeping, Yagna?”

“How can I sleep? I woke at dawn . . with the thought that I am to be married to-day”

“You are sorry, darling, are you?” she whispered, there was in her heart a mingling of hope and fear.

“Wherefore? Shall I be sorry that I must leave your home, and go to my own?”

Dominikova, crushing down the pang which suddenly seized her at the words, did not reply at once. She rose from her bed, dressed herself carelessly, and went out to wake up the lads in the stable. These had overslept themselves somewhat, the “Unbinding of Hair”<sup>1</sup> having taken place in the cabin the evening before. It was broad daylight, and the morning, clad in hoarfrost, flooded the world with silvery splendour.

Dominikova washed her face in the passage, and went quietly about the house, ever and anon peeping at Yagna, whose face was scarcely discernible in the shades of the bedroom, dark as yet.

“Lie there, darling! lie there still! Lie for the last time in thy mother’s home,” she murmured, love and sorrowing pain contending within her many a time. What she had coveted so ardently, she had now yet she felt such anguish that she could not but wince at the smart of it, and sat down upon the bed.—Boryna . . a kind man, who would treat her daughter with due respect. . . And Yagna could do whatever she liked with this man, who saw nothing in the whole world but her!

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<sup>1</sup> As in some parts of Poland peasant-girls’ tresses are cut after the wedding, they have a little domestic party the evening before, to which only girls are invited, and the tresses are then undound, ready to be shorn—*Translator’s Note.*



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No. It was not he that she dreaded, but the stepchildren—Ah, why had he driven the Anteks from his home? Now, if ever, would they brew mischief and seek revenge. But yet, if he had not done so? . . . Antek at Yagna's side!—A sin against God might have ensued—Well, there was no help for it now. The banns were published, the guests invited, the pig was killed, the settlement safely stowed away . . . No, no, no! What would have come of it had to come, and while Dominikova lived, she would suffer no wrong to be done to her daughter—Having come to this final decision, she went out to rate the lads for their sloth.

When she returned, she thought to rouse her daughter too, but Yagna had fallen asleep again, and the quiet regular breathing of slumber was heard from her bed. Once more did the mother feel anxieties and uncertainties swoop down upon her, like hawks with talons tearing at her heart, screaming distrust, and predicting some vaguely awful impending doom. But she dropped on her knees by the window and, with red bleared eyes fixed upon the flushed dawn, prayed very hard for a long time. And she rose, full of strength to meet any fate that might come, no matter what!

"Now, Yagna dear, get up, it is high time. Eva is coming at once to cook, and we have so much to do still!"

"Is the weather fine?" the girl inquired, raising her heavy head.

"So fine that all the country round is glistening over with hoarfrost. The sun will rise presently."

Yagna, aided by her mother, was soon dressed. Then the latter, after due consideration, spoke thus:

"What I have told you before, I will repeat again. Boryna is a good, kind man, but you must take great care . . . not to make friends with any chance acquaintance, or let tongues ever again wag against you. People are curs they love to bite.—You hear me, dear?"

"I hear, yes, but you speak as though I had not any judgment at all."

## 、 PEASANT WEDDING

"No one is the worse for good advice—See well to this Boryna must never be set at naught, but always treated with tender respect. An old man cares much more for that sort of thing than a young one does . . . And who knows whether he may not settle all his land on you? or perhaps give you a big sum—from hand to hand?"

: "For that I care nothing" She interrupted impatiently.

"Because you are young and inexperienced. Look round you what is it men quarrel for, work for, and make every attempt to get? Why, what but property, property alone!—The Lord never, never made you for toil and suffering.—Whom have I laboured for all my life, if not for my Yagna?—And now I shall be alone—quite alone!"

"But the lads will not quit your side, they will always be with you."

"Of them I have as much joy as of the day that is no more!" She wept, and added, wiping her eyes. "You must also live in harmony with your husband's children"

"Yuzka is a kindly girl Gregory will not be back from the army for some time yet. And—and . . ."

"Beware of the smith!"

"Why, he is on the best of terms with Matthias."

"If so, it is for some reason of his own be sure of that. —The Anteks are worst of all, they will not be reconciled. . . His Reverence wanted to make peace yesterday, but they would none of it"

"Oh, but Matthias is a wicked old man to drive them from his house!" Yagna burst out passionately.

"What's that—what do you say, Yagna? Do you know that Antek would have taken back the land from us—that he cursed you, and said of you things unfit to repeat?"

"Antek against me? Antek? They lie—who told you so. . . . May their foul tongues drop out of their heads!"

"Oh! And what is it sets you so strongly on his side? Say!" she asked with a threatening look.

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"Their being all against him ! I am not a begging dog that fawns on all who toss him bread. He is ill-used, and I know it !"

"You would like to return the deed of settlement to him, would you not?"

Yagna could speak no further, a stream of tears fell from her eyes, she rushed into the inner room, bolted the door, and cried there for a long while.

Dominikova did not try to interfere. The scene had awakened new feelings of anxiety in her mind, but she had no time to brood over them. Eva came, the lads slouched into the passage, the last preparations and arrangements were now to be made.

The sun was up, and the morning-tide rolling on.

The frost of the previous night had been hard enough for the road-side pools and the borders of the pond to be coated with ice, and the quagmires to bear the weight of the lesser flocks.

Now it was growing warmer, though in the shadow and under the hedges the frost still reigned. The thatches dripped with crystal drops, and wreaths of smoke-like vapour were curling up from the marshes.

Not the least little cloud floated in the dark azure of the sky.

Nevertheless, crows hovering about the cabins, and cocks frequently crowing, foretold bad weather to come.

It was Sunday, and though the bells had not yet begun to ring, the whole village was like a hive of swarming bees. Half the inhabitants were smartening themselves up for the wedding of Boryna with Yagna.

In every cabin, turmoil and racket prevailed, everyone was getting ready, trying things on, and dressing carefully, and out of many an open window and door came the sounds of merry voices.

On Dominikova's premises, of course, everything was in seething tumult, as usual on such a day.

## PEASANT WEDDING

The cottage, freshly whitewashed, was noticeable from afar, having been decorated with green boughs in Whitsuntide fashion. Already the day before, the boys had come to fix pine-branches on the thatched roof and where possible along every chunk in the wall. From the fence to the porch fir-tree boughs had been likewise set up, so that the fragrance was like that of the woods in the springtime.

Within, the arrangements made were very fine indeed.

On the farther side of the house, generally used as a storeroom, a great fire had been made, and Eva from the miller's was cooking there with some neighbours and Yagustynka to help her.

All the furniture had been removed from the other side, the room whitewashed afresh within, the chimney-piece veiled with a great piece of blue drapery. Nothing remained but the holy images on the walls, but the lads had carried in stout benches and long tables, which they set up along the sides. The ceiling, with its age-darkened rafters, had been adorned with paper figures that Yagna had herself cut out. Matthias had fetched her coloured paper from town, out of which she had snipped many a fringed and variously coloured circle, and imitating flowers, and curiosities of different descriptions—as, for instance, a dog running after sheep, its master following it, staff in hand, or a church procession, with priest, banners flying, and images borne aloft—and so many other marvels of the same kind, it was impossible to remember them all! And all were well-shaped and artistic in appearance, and had been greatly admired the evening before, when they were unplaiting Yagna's tresses. She knew how to make many another thing besides—anything that caught her eye or fancy, and in all Lipka there was not a cabin without some cutting made by her hands.

Having partly dressed herself in the other room, she came out to paste the rest of her cuttings upon the walls beneath the holy images, there being no room anywhere else.

"Yagna! will you have done with those fancy things of yours? The people are assembling, the band is marching

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through the village and that girl is amusing herself with drolleries!"

"Plenty of time, plenty of time," she retorted briefly, but she now stuck no more cuttings, and busied herself strewing the floor with pine needles, laying the tables with fine linen cloth, exchanging a few words with her brother, or strolling about the place and looking out at the scenery. But she felt no pleasure in all this, not the least. She was going to dance and hear the band play, and was fond both of music and of dancing that was all. Her soul, like the present day of autumn serenity, was cloudless and radiant, but lifeless. Were it not that all things reminded her it was her wedding-day, she might even have forgotten that. At the "Unplaiting," the day before, Boryna had put in her hands eight strings of coral beads—all that his wives had left at their death. And now they lay at the bottom of her trunk she had not even put them on. To-day she felt no interest in anything. Willingly would she have flown away somewhere—but where, she knew not! Everything teased her, and what her mother had told her about Antek recurred persistently to her mind. What! *he* speak evil of her? She could not, would not believe it the very thought made tears start.—Yet, might be! . . . Yesterday, she was washing linen, he had passed by, and never looked her way! In the morning, she was going with Boryna to confession. Antek, coming in their direction, had turned back as from a savage dog. . . . Well, then, let him snarl at her if he would, let him snarl!

She began to feel herself in indignant revolt against him. But a sudden flash of memory brought that evening back to her, when they had returned together from plucking cabbages at his father's. The recollection went to her head—her mind was wrapped and plunged in flames all over, it revived so intensely that it was not to be borne. Thereupon, to make a diversion, she cried point-blank to her mother

"I'll have you know I won't let my hair be cut off after the wedding!"

"Here's a clever one for you! Who ever heard of a girl whose hair was not shorn after the wedding?"

## PEASANT WEDDING

"At manoirs, and in towns "

"Certainly Yes, they—*they* have to keep their hair, to cheat the folk, and pass for what they are not—Why would you bring in a new order of things, you? Let the manor girls make laughing-stocks of themselves by all means, let them go about, hairy as Jewesses. They are fools, and they may. But you—no town rubbish, a daughter of the soil from grandsire and greatgrandsire—you have to do as has ever been done amongst our peasantry!—Ah, I know them, those town conceits and fancies!"

Yagna, however, stuck to her point. Eva, an experienced woman, who knew many villages, and year after year went on foot to Chenstohova with the pilgrim companies, tried her best to persuade the girl, so did Yagustynka, though according to her way seasoning her advice with jests and bitter raileries. At last she said,

"Keep your tresses, do, they will serve Boryna, when he beats you. He'll twist them round his hand, and so use his stick better upon you. And then you will cut them off by yourself . . . I knew a woman . . ." But here she broke off. Vitek had come to call her. She was staying with Boryna since Antek's expulsion, Yuzka proving too young for a housekeeper. Now helping Eva in the cooking, she would once in a while run round to the house to see to things there, as the old man's brain was topsyturvy that day. Ever since morning. Yuzka had been at the blacksmith's, smartening herself, and Kuba lay continually ill in bed.

The lad had come in a hurry. "Kuba wants you sorely pray come this instant."

"Off at once!—Good friends, I shall just see what it is, and be back here directly "

"Hurry, Yagna, we are expecting the bridesmaids," said Dominikova warningly.

But she made no haste at all, seemingly in a drowsy fit. . . . Her work fell from her fingers, and she would stand sometimes gazing vacantly out of window. Her soul was as though turned to water within her—water that flowed

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thither and thither, and now and again splashed and broke on some rock of memory.

In the cottage, the hubbub was ever increasing, with the constant arrival of many a dame—now a kinswoman, now a housewife these according to ancient custom, bringing Dominikova fowls, or a loaf of wheaten bread, cake, salt, flour, pieces of bacon, or a silver zloty wrapped up in paper—all these things as thank-offerings for the invitation, and to make up for the heavy expenses incurred.

Each of them drank a little nip of sweet wine, chatted a few minutes with the old dame, admired everything, and hurried away.

Dominikova herself superintended the cooking, cleared things away, and saw that everything was duly done, not omitting to scold her son for laziness, and, indeed, they dawdled much, and each of them slipped out whenever he could into the village to the Voyt's, where the musicians and the bridesmen had gathered already.

Few people attended High Mass, and this vexed his Reverence, because folk had forgotten the Divine Service on account of a mere wedding. Which was very true, but people also said to themselves that such a wedding was not to be witnessed every Sunday.

All those invited came driving in at once after the noonday meal from the neighbouring villages.

The sun, shedding a dim hazy splendour over the autumn fields, had begun to roll westward, the ground seemed shiny and glistening as if with dew, the pond shimmered tremulously, the roadside ditches had a glassy gleam, the whole landscape was soaked in the dying light and the cooling heat of the last autumn days.

Burning down like a candle, the day was slowly approaching extinction.

The village of Lipka, however, was inspired with all the animation of a fair.

No sooner had the Vesper bells rung for the first time than all the musicians at the Voyt's sallied forth into the road.

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First came the fiddlers, each marching abreast with a flutist, then the bass-viol-players, and the drummers, to whose instruments there were little bells attached, all adorned with flying ribbons, and advancing with elastic steps.

After the musicians walked a troop of eight the two "proposers," who had arranged the match, and the six bridesmen. These were all handsome young fellows slender as pine-trees, slim-waisted, broad-shouldered, enthusiastic dancers, audacious of speech, fond of a fray, and great sticklers for their rights such were they all six, and all of good families, pure farmer's blood.

Together they marched, shoulder to shoulder, down the middle of the road, the ground echoing under the tramping of their boots with such merry daredevil looks, and so gayly adorned, that they killed the whole scene—a vision of striped trousers glancing the sun, of scarlet jackets, hats decked with bunches of floating ribbons, and white capotes, open and flapping in the breeze like wings.

Uttering shrill cries, and humming joyful tunes, on they dashed, tramping noisily in measure—a young pine grove in motion and rushing with the blast!

The musicians played polonaises, going from hut to hut to call the wedding guests, here wine was offered them, there they were asked in, elsewhere a song would answer to their tunes, while on all sides the folk came out, dressed in their best raiment, and went swelling the main body. And under the windows of the bridesmaids all sang in unison the following verse

Lasses, lightly treading,  
Come ye to the wedding—  
Hear our gleeful tune!  
  
Hear our voices' chorus  
Join with flute sonorous—  
Hautboy and bassoon!



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Let the tankard clink now  
Who is loth to drink now—  
He's a scuiivy loon!  
Oy ta dana dana,  
Oy ta dana dana,  
Oy ta dana da!

And then they shouted so loud that they could be heard throughout the whole village, and beyond in the fields and the forests

The fulk had come out in front of their houses, into the orchards. Many who had not been invited joined the party, merely to look on and listen, so, before it had reached its destination, pretty nearly the whole village was round them, pressing and surging on every side, while the children ran on in front, a dense crowd, a swift and a noisy one.

Having brought the guests to the bridal cottage, playing them in with a joyful strain, they returned to fetch the bridegroom.

Vitek, who, brave in his short jacket adorned with ribbons, had accompanied the bridesmen, now ran fast before them.

"Master!" he cried through the window. "They are coming!" And off he ran to where Kuba lay.

They played a good while there before the porch. Boryna came out directly, threw the door wide open, and would have had them all in, but the Voyt and the Soltys took him by each arm and led him straight away to Yagna, for it was high time to go to church.

His gait was full of mettle, and he looked surprisingly young. Clean-shaven, with hair newly cut, and his wedding suit on, he made a rarely handsome figure, besides which, portly and broad-shouldered as he was, the dignified expression both of his features and his whole outer man made him conspicuous from afar. He smiled and talked pleasantly with the young men who had come; especially with the smith, who managed to be always close to him.

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They brought him in ceremony to Dominikova's, where the crowd made place for him; and, with tumultuous cries, and sounds of many instruments and songs, he entered the cabin

Yagna was as yet invisible the women were arraying her in the inner room, carefully watched and strongly bolted. For the young fellows knocked and battered at the door, they cut narrow slits in the partitions, and made careless jests with the bridesmaids whereupon rose great screaming, much laughter, and of old women's scolding not less

The old dame, with her sons, received the guests, offered wine, conducted the elders to the places reserved for them, and in short had an eye to everything.

All the guests were of high condition no common men, but only men of property and of good family, and of these only the wealthiest. All were connected with the Porynas and the Paches by ties of family and friendship, or were at least acquaintances who had driven over from distant villages.

Presently the door opened, and the organist's wife and the miller's ushered Yagna into the big room. The bridesmaids formed a circle round her—a wreath of human flowers they were, all so beautifully dressed and so fair to see. And she—she stood in their midst, like a rose, the most fearless of them all, with head-dress of plumes and ribbons and silver and gold lace, she was like one of those images they carry in church processions, and they all stood mute before her.

Ah! since the Mazur was first danced, no one was ever more splendid!

Then did the bridesmen lift up their voices, growling from the depths of their throats

Resound O violin, resound!

(Yagna, now ask pardon of your mother!)

Resound, O flageolet, resound!

(Yagna, no ask pardon of each brother!)

Boryna came forward and took her hand. They both knelt, and Dominikova made the sign of the cross over them

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with an image, and then sprinkled them both with holy water. Yagna, bursting into tears, fell at her mother's knees, embracing them, and the other women's too, as she begged pardon and took leave of them all. The women gathered her into their arms, passing her from one to another, and all wept much, Yuzka the most, thinking of her dead mother.

They all formed up before the house and marched off on foot, for the church was but one field away.

Then the bridesmen took possession of Yagna. She walked on with delight, smiling through the tears which still trembled in her lashes. She now was gay to see as a spring-blossoming bush, and riveted every eye. Her hair, braided over her forehead, bore above it a rich pile of gold spangles, and peacock's eyes, and sprigs of rosemary. Therefrom, down to her nape and shoulders, fell long ribbons of every hue, her white skirt was gathered at the waist in abundant folds, her corsage, of sky-blue velvet, was laced with silver, she wore great puffed sleeves to her chemise. Round her throat there was an abundant frill, embroidered with designs in dark-blue thread, and necklaces of coral and amber row upon row, hung covering half her bosom.

Matthias was being led by the bridesmaids.

As the stalwart oak may be seen rising behind the graceful pine in the woods, so did he appear after Yagna's figure. There was in his gait a certain jaunty swing, and he shot glances on either side of the road, he fancied he had beheld Antek in the ruck.

Following him came Dominikova, with the "proposers," the smith and his family, Yuzka, the miller's and the organist's people, and all the persons of any note.

And following these came the whole village.

The sun was now hanging above the woods, red enormous, flooding all the road, and the pond, and the huts, with its blood-red glow.

In the midst of this crimson conflagration they walked on slowly. It made the eyes blink to see them as they went

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—with ribbons and peacock plumes and flowers, gay in red trousers, petticoats of orange tints, rainbow kerchiefs, snowy capotes just as if a whole field full of flowers in bloom had arisen and moved forward, sway in the wind !

Aye, and singing too ! For again and again the high treble of the bridesmaids' voices would strike up the ditty

On the clattering wagons go,  
And my heart is full of woe,  
Alas !

Round you while our songs rise glad,  
You, O Yagna, you are sad,  
Alas !

All the way, Dominikova was in tears, her eyes fixed upon Yagna alone

Ambrose was already lighting the tapers in church when they came

They formed in ranks—two and two—and proceeded toward the high altar, just as the priest was coming out of the sacristy

The wedding was soon over, his Reverence had to visit a sick man in haste. When they left the church, the organist played them out with Mazurs, Obertases, and Kuyavy dances, till their feet beat time of themselves, and more than one was on the point of singing aloud, but luckily remembered where he was

They returned pell-mell, and very noisily, for bridesmen and bridesmaids were singing together

Dominikova got to her home first and, when the company arrived, was there to welcome the newly married couple on her threshold, and offer them the hallowed bread and salt, then she had to receive the whole company a second time, embrace them all, and ask them in once more !

In the passage, the music was striking up. So, on passing the threshold, everyone made a partner of the first woman he met, to perform the stately polonaise that was being played. At once, like a many-coloured serpent, a

chain of couples, following each other about the room, waved and twined, twisted and turned back decorously, struck the floor with dignity, swayed to and fro in graceful undulation, placed, swam, wheeled about, one after another in serried ranks, Boryna with Yagna leading off!

The lights placed on the chimney penthouse flickered, the very walls seemed like to fall asunder with the forceful gravity of this solemn dance, performed with such dignified grace.

This was the introduction and lasted but some minutes. Then began the first dance, in honour of the bride, and according to the usages and customs of old days. All present squeezed themselves into corners, or huddled against the walls, and the young men made a wide circle, within which she danced. As she stepped out, she felt the blood tingling in her veins, her dark-blue eyes shone, her white teeth gleamed, her face was flushed, she danced persistently, and for a long time, for she was obliged to give each partner at least one turn round the room, and dance with all.

The musicians worked hard—worked till they felt worn out but Yagna seemed to have but just begun. The flush on her face deepened, she turned and whirled more impetuously than ever, her ribbons fluttered and rustled as she went by—lashing those near her on the cheek, and her skirt, expanding to the streaming air, spread out and bellied wide around her.

The young men, delighted beat time on the tables and shouted in eager excitement.

It was only after all the others that she chose her bridegroom. Boryna, who had been waiting so long, now leaped forward, pouncing on her like a forest lynx, seized her waist, whirled her round like a hurricane, and cried to the players.

“Now, boys, the Mazur—and with a will!”

All the instruments sounded with might and main, the whole room was in a fever.

Holding Yagna in a strong grip, Boryna lifted the skirts

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of his capote over each arm, settled his hat upon his head, clicked his heels together, and set off, swift as the wind !

Ah ! but how he danced ! Now turning round and round, now with a backward step, now bringing his foot down as if he would stamp the floor to shivers—then sidling with Yagna, and sweeping her on, and whisking her hither and thither, and whirling her so that the twain formed but one indistinct mass, looking for all the world like a spindle full of yarn, spinning about a room, and from each of them there came forth a full blast of power and force

Furiously, unceasingly, the players went on playing the Mazur dance !

The crowds in the corners and at the door looked on in silent wonder Boryna was so indefatigably active, and ever at higher and higher pressure, that he instilled not a few with riotous boisterousness, even to beating the measure with their feet, and some of the hottest heads, no longer restrained by decorum, seized a girl and danced about with her.

Yagna, though brawny and well-knit, soon had to give in, he felt her weakening in his arms, and immediately ceased from dancing, and led her to the inner room.

"What a splendid fellow you are !" the miller cried out. "Henceforth you are my brother !—Ask me to be godfather at the first christening, I pray you !" And he put his arm round Boryna's neck. Soon they were on very familiar terms, for the music had stopped and refreshments were handed round.

Dominikova and her sons, with the smith and Yagustynka, now glided swiftly about, bearing bottles and clusters of glasses, and drank with each one. Yuzka and the friends of the old dame carried pieces of bread and cake about in sieves to the guests

And the tumult grew and increased.

On a bench near the window sat the miller, with Boryna, the Voyt, the organist—all the notables in the place besides, and there a bottle of rum—not of the worst—was circulating among them

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Many were also standing about the room in groups, talking loudly to anyone they met, as they felt inclined, and the vodka glasses were in requisition.

The inner room was lit by the organist's great lamp, lent for the occasion. The housewives, with the organist's wife and the miller's at their head, had gathered there, and sat on chests and benches strewn with pieces of woven wool. They held their heads up with great dignity, sipped their mead by tiny droplets, crumbled the sweet cake with dainty fingers, and very rarely threw in a word or two, but listened attentively while the miller's wife told them all about her children.

The very passages were quite full. Some tried to invade the other side, but Eva drove them out. They proved too greedy for the dishes, the appetizing scent of which had filled the house, and was making many a mouth water.

The young people then dispersed all about the premises, in the yard and the orchard. The night was chilly, but serene and starlit. Here they strolled, disporting themselves in merry guise, and all the place echoed with laughter, shouts and running to and fro, one chasing another among the trees. So the elders cried a warning to them from the window.

"Are ye seeking flowers by night girls?—

But who paid heed to them?

Yagna and Natusia were walking about the big room, their arms round each other's waists, whispering together, and ever and anon bursting into laughter. Simon, Dominikova's eldest son, was watching them, with eyes glued to Natusia, and frequently going to her with wine and attempting conversation.

The blacksmith had dressed up most grandly, having on a black capote, and trousers over which the boots were drawn. He slipped about with great activity, was everywhere, drank with everybody, walked to and fro and talked and his red head and freckled face were never long on the same spot.

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The young people danced several times, but not long, nor with much animation. They were looking forward to the supper.

The old men, on their side, were deep in debate, the Voyt raising his voice higher and higher, striking the table with his fist, and laying down the law.

"I, the Voyt, have said it you may take it from me. I, a man in office, have received a paper commanding me to call a meeting, and order half a kopek per acre to be voted by every landowner for educational purposes."

"You, Peter, may vote even five kopeks an acre if you like. we won't!"

"No, that we will not!" one of the men roared.

"But I am making you a statement as an official!"

"We do not care for such schools as those," Boryna remarked, and the others assented in chorus.<sup>1</sup>

"In Vola," said one, "there is a school which my children attended for three winters running. What is the result? They cannot even read in a prayer-book.—Devil take such teaching!"

"Let the mothers teach prayers at home, prayers have naught to do with studies. I, the Voyt, tell you this!"

"Then what are schools for?" grumbled the man from Vola, rising.

"I will tell you, I the Voyt but listen . . ."

Here he was interrupted by Simon, who cried aloud to them all that the trees of the clearing sold to the Jews had already been branded by them, and that they would have them cut down as soon as the sledges could run.

"Brand the trees they may. to fell them will be harder!" Boryna put in.

"We shall complain to the commissary"

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<sup>1</sup> The reader should bear in mind that this book was published before the First World's War, when only schools where Russian was taught were permitted by the government, and Polish was not learned except in secret.—*Translator's Note*



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"Who is hand in glove with the Squire?—No let us go in a body and drive the woodmen off"

"They shall not hew down one single sapling!"

"Matthias, drink to me! Now is no time for holding councils A tipsy man will even defy God!" So cried the miller, filling Boryna's glass. The talk was as little to his taste as the treats were, for he had an agreement drawn up with the Jews, and the trees were to go to his sawmill.

They drank and left their places, the tables were now to be laid for supper, and all the needful things were being brought in.

The farmers, however, still stuck to their forest grievance, which was a great wrong done to them They formed a group, and with lowered voices (so that the miller might not overhear them) determined to thresh the matter out at Boryna's.

At this juncture, Ambrose came in, and went straight to them He had come late, having had to go with his Reverence to a sick person three villages away, in Kiosnova So now he set to drink energetically, to make up for lost time. Vainly for at that very moment a chorus of elderly women struck up the song

Bridesmen, about, about! With you it rests

Round the spread tables now to bring the guests!

To which they replied, having given the signal by striding on the benches

Lo, we have called them they are ready here

Your spread to taste, if it be but good cheer,

The guests, now straggling in to table, took their seats on the benches

The newly married couple had the first places, and all the others sat about them in order of precedence, as they were higher in standing, in possessions, or more advanced in age—from the elders to the girls and children Tables had been set up along three of the walls, and yet there was

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scarce room for them all. The bridesmen and the musicians remained standing, the former to serve the guests

There was a hush. The organist stood up and said a prayer aloud, after which, a glass went round, with the sentiment "Health and enjoyment!"

The cooks and bridesmen then bore in a huge and deep dish of smoking food, singing the while

Friends, we bring you dainty food  
Fowls in rice-soup boiled and stewed!

And, carrying in the second dish

Tripe with pepper, spiced and hot  
He's a fool that likes it not!

The musicians, stationed near the fire-place, played various tunes very softly, to give more savour to the food

All the company ate with becoming refinement, and deliberation, few spoke at all, and for some time the room resounded only with the sound of munching and the clatter of spoons. When they had to some extent slaked their appetites, the smith set another bottle in circulation, and now they began conversing (though in low tones) to one another across the table

Yagna ate scarcely anything at all. In vain did Boryna urge and coax her, entreating her as one entreats a child to eat. She could not even swallow the meat before her, she was so hot, so tired!

"Yagna, are you content, sweet? Most beautiful Yagna, you will be as happy with me as ever you were with your mother . . . Yagna, you will be a lady—a lady! I'll hire a girl, that you may not be overworked."—He spoke in hushed tones, and looking with love into her eyes, caring not for what folk might say, and they began to make fun of him openly.

"He looks like a cat after bacon!"

"How the old fellow flaunts his wantonness! Beside him, a cock is nothing at all!"

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"Oh, he is enjoying himself, Grandfather Boryna is!"

"As a dog does out in the frost," old Simon here muttered spitefully.

All held their sides with laughter, and the miller laid his face down on the table and beat it with his fists for sheer joy!

Once more the cooks entered, proclaiming

Here is a dish of Turkish wheat,

Cooked, with plenty of lard, for lean folk to eat!

"Yagna, just bend over to me, I'll tell you a thing," the Voyt said, plucking at her dress behind her bridegroom, whose next neighbour he was.

"I would be your child's godfather," he cried, laughing, and gloating over her with greedy eyes.

At this, she grew very red, and the women, seeing this, fell a-laughing and jesting yet more facetiously, some setting to explain to her how she ought to behave to her husband

"You'll have to warm a feather-bed for him every evening before the fire, or he'll be cold as ice"

"And especially see he has much fat to eat it will keep him in good condition"

"And pet him well, with your arms round his neck."

"And drive him with a gentle hand, that he may not know he is driven at all!"

So they babbled on, each sentence freer than the last, as happens when women have taken too much, and let their tongues run away with them.

All in the room were shaking with merriment, and things at last went so far that the miller's wife set to lecturing them on their duties towards the girls and little one's present and the organist pointed out how grievous a sin it was to cause others to offend by evil example

"What? is this bellow-blowers forbidding people every pleasure in life?"

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"Being close to the priest, he thinks himself a saint!"

"Let him stop his ears, an it like him not." And more unpleasant cries began to be heard, for he was disliked in the village.

"We have a wedding to-day, and therefore, my good people, I, your Voyt, assure you it is no sin to enjoy yourselves, laugh at things laughable, and make merry."

"And our Lord Himself used to go to weddings and drink wine," Ambrose added seriously, but no one made out what he said, as he was now tipsy, and sitting by the door besides. Then all fell to talking, joking, clinking glasses, and eating more and more slowly, in order to get more compactly filled up, some even, to make room for the most food possible, undid their girdles, and sat straight and stiff

Again the cooks entered, with the following couplet

It grunting, squealing, rooting once  
about the garden ran

But now, for all the harm it did,  
'twill pay the husbandman!

"Well, they have done the thing grandly!" the people declared

"Truly, this wedding must come at least to a thousand *zloty*!"

"Oh, she can well afford it has she got six acres of land thereby?"

"Just look at Yagna! Is she not gloomy as night?"

"As a set-off, Boryna's eyes are shining like a wildcat's."

"Say, like tinder, my friend—rotten tinder!"

"Aye, the man will weep over this day yet."

"No He is not of the weeping sort. Of the cudgeling rather."

"Just what I said to the Voyt's wife, when she told me the marriage had been settled."

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"Ah, I wonder why she is not here to-night."

"Out of the question Her child may be due any day."

"But I'd lay my head that in no long time—say, before the Carnival begins—Yagna will be again running after the lads"

"Matthew is only waiting for that.

"I know Vavrek's wife overheard him say so in the tavern."

"Because he was not asked to the wedding"

"Yes The old fellow would have had him, but Dominikova was against it.—All the folk know why, do they not?"

"Well, all say so, but what has anybody seen?"

"Bartek Koziol saw them in the wood last spring"

"He is a liar and a thief Dominikova accused him of stealing a pig, and what he says may be mere spite."

"But others too—there be others that have eyes"

"All this will end ill . . . you will see 'This no affair of mine, but to my mind, Antek and his family have been unjustly dealt with.

"Of Antek, too, people talk—say they have been seen together here and there"—The voices dropped lower as the spiteful talk went on, leaving no shred of reputation on any of the family, and the more unmerciful for their hostes as they had more pity for her two sons.

"Is't not a sin?—Simon, a man wearing mustachios—thirty, if a day—and she will not let him marry, nor leave the house and for the slight fault she raises a tempest!"

"It is indeed a shame such strapping lads, and doing all the woman's work!"

"So that Yagna, forsooth, may not soil her hands!"

"Each of them has five acres of his own, and mighty marry at his ease!"

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"Yes, yes, your own poor Martianna, waiting for ages, and the land quite close by Paches!"

"You let her alone! See rather to your girl Franka, lest she come to grief with Adam!"

"Those great oafs!—Afraid to leave their mother's apron strings!"

"They are beginning Simon has been all the evening staring at Nastka "

"Their father was of the like mould I remember well—Aye, and the old woman was in her time no better than Yagna "

"As the root is, so the boughs, as the mother, so the daughter "

The music ceased, and, supper being over, the musicians went to refresh themselves in the kitchen. But after a time the noise waxed even louder than before, and the whole place seethed with uproar all talking, ranting, shouting away one to the other across the tables, and no one able to make out what was said.

At the close of the meal, the most select guests were offered a drink compounded of mead and spices, while the others got strong vodka and beer in abundance

By this time, but few were well aware of what they were drinking, being too far gone and in a blissful state. They made themselves comfortable, and unbuttoned their capotes to be cooler, beat the tables with their fists till the dishes jingled, embraced each other, either roend the neck or clutching at the shirt-collar; and they talked freely, unboresoming themselves and telling all their sorrows as if they had been brothers.

"'Tis ill living here on earth! Things are out of gear with mankind, and we have naught but grief!"

"Aye, men are like dogs, snapping at one another for a bone."

"No consolation, save when neighbour meets neighbour over a glass, and they take counsel, and make complaint,

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and if any has wronged or been wronged, he is forgiven and forgives!"

"As even now, at this wedding-feast but, ah! for one day only!"

"Ah! Tomorrow will come, though we call him not! You'll not shun him, save in God's hallowed Acre. Yea, he will come and seize you, and lay on you his yoke, and smite you with the whip of poverty, and you, O man! must pull . . . even till the yoke be bloodstained"

"What is't aggravates our misery, setting men one against the other, like dogs quarrelling for a fleshless bone?"

"Not poverty alone, but an Evil Power, and they then are blinded by him, discerning not good from evil.

"Truly so, and he bloweth upon our souls as one bloweth on half-quenched embers, and he causeth greed, malice and all wickedness to burst out into flame!"

"Yes, for he that is deaf to the commandments hath a quick ear for the music played in hell"

"It was otherwise of old days—Then was there obedience, and respect for old men, and concord."

"And each man had land, as much as he could till and pastures, and meadows, and the forest."

"Who in those days ever heard of taxes?"

"Or was there anyone that purchased timber? He had but to drive to the wood and take all he needed, though it were the best pine or oak. The property of the Squire was the peasants' property too"

"And now it belongs to neither, but to the Jews, or to men still worse"

"The foul carrion! (I have drunk to you drink you to me! . . . They are now established as on land of their own! (Your health, Brother! . . . To drink vodka is not a sin, if only at the proper season and with brothers. this is a wholesome thing, it cleanses the blood and drives away distempers"

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"Who drinks at all, should drink one quart complete—likewise, who makes merry, should do it all Sunday long.—But have you work to do? Man, do it with all your might, grudge not your force, but put forth all your strength. And if ill things come to pass—if your wife be taken, if your cattle die, or your home burn down—why, 'tis the will of God. Do not rebel what will it avail you to lament, poor creature as you are? Be patient, therefore, trust in God's mercy. Aye, and if the worst should hap, and should grim Cross—Bones stare you in the face and clutch your throat attempt not to escape, which is more than you can do, all is in the hand of God!"

"Verily, who is to know the day when the Lord shall declare 'Thus far, O man, is thine what is beyond is mine?'"

"It is of a truth. As lightning flashes, so are the decrees of God and none, be he a priest, be he a sage, can know them till they fall, as ripe corn falls out of the ear."

"Man, you have to know but one thing—to do your duty, live as God commands you, and not look too far ahead—Surely our Lord prepares the wages of His servants, and pays most strictly what is due to each."

"By these laws did the Polish people stand of old, and they are for ever and ever, Amen.

"Aye, and by patience shall prevail against the gates of hell."

Thus they discoursed together, with not infrequent libations, everything pouring out all he felt in his heart, all that had long stuck in his throat and stifled him. Ambrose talked the most of all and the loudest.

At the very end, Eva and Yagustynka came in with great ceremony, bearing in front of them a large ladle, tricked out and beribboned. A musician who followed accompanied them on his fiddle, while they sang

Ere you quit us, here come we,  
'Fore you both your cooks you see



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Pray forget us not, good men  
For each dish give stivers three,  
For our seasoning stivers ten!

The company had eaten plentifully, and drunk yet more, their hearts were warmed by good cheer, and many a man tossed even silver coins into the ladle as it passed.

They then slowly rose from table, and went out, some to breathe the fresh air, some to resume their conversation in the passages or in the great room, some gave way to enthusiastic demonstrations of friendship, and more than one reeled about, running his head against the walls or some other man, butting like rams

Only the Voyt remained at the board with the miller, both quarrelling with intense fury, and about to fly at each other like two haws, when Ambrose came to reconcile them offering more vodka.

"Back to your church porch, old beggar," the Voyt snarled at him, "and hold yourself aloof from your betters"

So Ambrose walked off in dudgeon, hugging the bottle to his breast, stumping noisily and seeking someone to drink and talk with as a friend.

The young people had dispersed about the orchard, or were walking arm-in-arm along the roan, with much horse-play, and chasing of one another, and shouting. The night was serene, the moon hung over the pond, which glittered so bright that the feeblest circles tremulous on its surface were distinctly visible, moving like snake-coils in silence, responsive (as it seemed) to the light that struck on them from above. The frost was pretty hard, the road-ruts were crisp underfoot, the roofs rime-crust and hoary. It was in the small hours, for the first cock-crow had already been heard.

Meanwhile they set the great room in order for dancing again.

Rested and refreshed, the players now again, in subdued strains, called the guests together.

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Yagna had been taken to the private room by the matrons, Boryna sat with Dominikova close to the door, the elders took seats on benches and in corners, where they discussed various matters, and only the girls stood about the room besides, giggling together a pastime which soon tired them, and they decided on starting some games, "to stir the boys up a little"

First there was the game. "Fox goes out to make his round, both his hands and feet are bound."

Yasyek, nicknamed Topsy-turvy, was dressed up as Fox, in his sheepskin turned inside out. He was a silly fellow, a simpleton, and the laughing-stock of them all. Though a full-grown man, he played with children, and was in love with all the girls and foolish beyond measure but, being an only child with ten acres of his own, he was invited everywhere. Yuzka Boryna was his quarry, the Hare. And they laughed, Lord, how they laughed!

At every step, Yasyek stumbled and fell down, sprawling, with a thud like a log. The others too, put out their feet to make him fall, and Yuzka got out of his way with perfect ease she sat up quite as a hare does, and imitated to perfection the way its lips move.

Then came "Quails."

Nastka was leader, and so nimble that no one could catch her till she let them (in order to dance a measure with someone)

Finally, Tomek Vahník, was made up for a Stork, having a sheet over his head and long stick which held under it for beak, and he clack-clack-clacked like a real stork, so well that Yuzka, Vitek, and all the youngsters ran after him, calling (as they do to the live bird)

Klek, Klek, Klell!

Tey mother's in hell!

What does she there!

Cook children's fare!

What was her sin?

That her little ones' bellies had nothing in!

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And the hullabaloo was great, for he ran after them, and pecked with his beak, and flapped his wings violently.

These games lasted but an hour, when they had to make way for other observances.

Now the married women brought Yagna out of the private room, covered all over in a white wrapper, and seated her in the centre, on a kneading-trough on which a feather-bed had been put. The bridesmaids thereupon rushed forward as though to snatch her away, but the men kept them off and at last they formed a group opposite, intoning a sad and plaintive chant

Where is your wreath, oh, where  
Your bridal wreath so fair?  
Henceforth, to man's will bowed,  
A cap, your locks to shroud  
Your on your head must bear!

The matrons then uncovered her.

She was seen wearing the cap of the married women over the thick plaits of her tresses, yet in this disguise she appeared still more fascinating than before

To the slow strains of band, the whole assembly, young and old, struck up the "Hop-Song" in one grand unison of gladness. This ended, she was taken over by the matrons alone, to dance with them. Yagustynka, by this time much heated, set her arms akimbo, and flung this impromptu verse at her

Oh! had I known this day would see  
My Yagna wed a widower,  
A wreath I would have woven thee  
Of naught but prickly juniper!

After which came others, yet more biting than the first

But little note was taken of them, for the musicians had struck up for the greatest performance of all, and forward now came the dancers, and the trampling of many feet was heard. They crowded thickly, couple close to couple, cheek

## PEASANT WEDDING

by jowl, moving ever more swiftly as the dance went on. Capotes flew open and flapped wide, heels stamped, hats waved—now and then a snatch of song burst forth—the girls hummed the burden, “da dana,” and tore on more quickly still, and swayed in measure in the mighty, swirling, headlong rush! No one could any longer distinguish his neighbour in the throng, and when the violins burst forth in quick sharp volleys of clean-cut separate notes, a hundred feet echoed on the floor at once, a hundred mouths gave tongue, a hundred dancers, seized as by a cyclone, whirled round and round; and the restling of capotes, skirts kerchiefs waving about the room, was like the flight of a flock of many-coloured birds. On they went, on continually—dancing without the slightest pause for breath, the floor clattering like a drum, the walls vibrating, the room a seething cauldron. And the rapture of the dance waxed greater, greater yet

Then came the moment to perform rites which are always gone through when the bride puts aside her crown of rosemary.

First, Yagna had to pay toll, on entering the matrons' set!

Immediately afterwards, another ceremony was gone through. The men had a long rope, woven of the straw of unthreshed wheat, of which they made a large ring, carefully held and guarded by the bridesmaids, Yagna standing up in the middle. Whoever wished to dance with her was obliged to creep under it, tear her away by force, and tread a measure, though they scourged him all the time with cords, wherever they could. Finally, the miller's wife and Vahnikova made a collection, for “The Cap.” The Voyt came first, he tossed a gold piece into the plate; after that, silver pieces tinkled like hail, lastly, paper ones, as leaves in autumn

More than three hundred roubles were thus collected!

Dominikova, quite overcome to see so large a sum offered for Yagna's sake, told her sons to bring more vodka, with which she herself pledged her hosts, kissing her friends and weeping at their great kindness.

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"Drink, my good neighbours, drink, dear friends, beloved brothers of mine. . . . I feel spring back in my heart again, . . . ! Yagna's health. drink once more. . . once more . . ." And when she gave over, the smith drank with others, and her sons too, each separately, for the throng was very thick. Yagna too, thanking them heartily for their kindness, embraced the knees of the elders present.

The room was humming, the glasses circulating freely from hand to hand, everyone exhaled ardour and joy. Faces were crimson, eyes resplendent, hearts went out to hearts. They stood in knots about the room, drinking and talking blithely, each saying his say very loud, unheard by any, but not caring for that!—All felt at one, one joy united and penetrated them all! "Ye that have troubles, leave them for the tomorrow, take your fling to-night enjoy friendly company, solace your soul! Our hallowed land, its summer spell of fruit-bearing over, is given rest by the Lord even so is it meet that men should rest in autumn, when their field-work is done. Man, that have your corn-stacks piled and your granaries full of grain worth heaps of precious gold—rest you now from summer labour and toil gone by!"

So spake some, while others again revolved in their minds their troubles and their griefs.

To neither of these classes did Boryna belong. His eyes saw only Yagna, his heart swelling and throbbing with the pride of her beauty. Again and again would he throw *zloty* to the musicians, that they might not spare catgut for the sounds were growing weak, as their zeal was flagging.

On a sudden, then, they thundered out an Obertas that made one quiver to the backbone. Boryna leaped to Yagna's side, caught her in a mighty grasp, and at once started such a dance as shook the planks beneath them. He wafted her down the room—back again—clanged on the floor with his horseshoe heels—knelt suddenly to her, and sprung up again in flash—bore her about from wall to wall—roared out a solo which the instruments took up and accompanied, and still led the dance, while other couples imitated him, leaping, singing, stamping, and all with ever-increasing

## PEASANT WEDDING

rapidity as if as many spindles full of particoloured wools were together on the floor, turning, twisting, twirling, faster than the eyes could make out their hues, so that no one could discern lad from lass in the swift rush—only rainbow masses, flying about, driven as by a goal, with ever-changing tints, turning always with greater and more impetuous speed! At times the rush of air even blew out the candles, the music went on in the dark, and the dance as well, lit by the faint white beams of the moon shining in through the window. Then, athwart the seething dimness, were seen quick shadows, flying fast, chasing one another in the mingled darkness and silvery mist, foaming waves of pale glimmering and melodious din surged up out of the black night, in dusky harmonies of colour and sound—as in a vision or a dream—fading back into impenetrable murk, to loom once more distinct against the pallid wall, from which the glazed images of the saints reflected the moonbeams with crinkled flickers, and again the plunged and vanished into the shadows, and only the sounds of heavy breathing, and quick steps and cries, made their presence vaguely known in the entangled confusion of the unlit room!

One dance followed another in rapid succession, and with no interval between them. As each new dance was struck up, new dancers directly sprang forward, erect as a forest, swift of advance as a gale of wind, and loudly the stamping feet thundered afar, and shouts of merriment echoed through the house, while the onset went on, wild, mad, stormy, and earnest as a struggle for life and death.

Ah! how they danced!

Those Cracoviennes, with their frolicsome hop-skip-and-jump measures, and the quick lilt of their clean-cut, tinkling, metallic tunes, and the terse ditties, full of fun and freedom, with which, like the spangled girdles of the peasantry who made them, they are so brightly studded—those tunes welling with joyous dashing melody, redolent of the strong, abounding, audacious savour of youth in sportful pursuit of the sweet thrilling emotions that tell of the hey-day in the blood!

And those Mazurs, long-drawn-out as the paths which streak the endless plains, wind clamorous and vast as the endless plains they streak lowly, yet heaven-kissing, melancholy and bold, magnificent and sombre, stately and fierce genial, warlike, full of discordances, like that peasants' nature, set in battle array, united as a forest and rushing to dance with such joyful clamours and wonderful strength as could attack and overcome ten times their number, nay, conquer, sweep away, trample down, the whole of a hostile world, nor reck, though they themselves be doomed, and fall, but still carry on the dance after death, still stamping as in the Mazur—still crying out aloud "Oy dana dana!"

And oh, those Obertases!—short of rhythm, vertiginous wild and frantic, warlike and amorous, full of excitement mingled with dreamy languor and notes of sorrow, throbbing with hot blood, brimming over with geniality and kindness, in a sudden hailstorm, affectionate voices, dark-blue glances, springtime breezes, and fragrant wafts from blossoming orchards, like the song of fields in the young year, making tears and laughter to burst forth at the same time, and the heart to utter its lay of joy, and the longing soul to go beyond the vast fields around her, beyond the far-off forests, and soar dieming into the world of All Things, and sing ecstatically the burden, "Oy dana dana!"

And all these dances, beyond the power of words to describe, thus followed one after the other, that our peasantry might make merry in season!

And thus did they take their pleasures at the wedding of Boryna and Yagna

The hours slipped away in clamour and din and uproar in noisy merry-making and dances fast and furious they did not note that the dawn was spreading in the East, that the daybreak's streams were slowly pouring their pallor into the night's black gloom. The stars grew wan, the moon sank; a wind that sprang up beyond woods, passed by, chasing the dark that waxed thinner and thinner: the gnarled tufted trees looked in at the windows, bowing yet

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lower their slumbrous frost-crowned heads, but the folk within were singing and dancing still!

The doors had been thrown wide open, so had the windows, the house, brimming and boiling over with lights and tumult, trembled, creaked and groaned, while the dance went on, now in utterly uncontrollable and rapturous excitement. It seemed to those within—such was their state!—that trees and people, earth and stars, and the hedges and the time-honoured cabin itself, were all wrestling and writhing together, united in one inextricably whirling cluster, blind, intoxicated, raving, and in utter oblivion of all, reeling and rolling from room to room, from wall to wall, from passage to passage, and out into the road and the enormous world, caught in a round shat filled the universe—fading away in the long unbroken chain of crimson lights now glowing in the East!

And the music led them on—the tunes played and the songs.

How they kept time in their growling, the gruff bass-voils, uttering their broken humming sounds, like huge humblebees! And how the flutes led the band, merrily whistling and twittering, as in mockery of the drum's joyful thuds and strokes, swelled by the jingling of its bells that shook with laughter, and floated lightly like a Jew's beard in the wind! And then how the fiddles took the lead and came to the front, like girls leading the ballet, and sang out loud and shrill at first as though to try their voices—then played with wide, sorrowful, heart-rending sweeps of the bow—the lamentations of orphans driven from their homes—and then again, with an instantaneous change, fell into a lilting tune—short, trilling, sharp, like the tripping of a hundred dancers' heels, at which a hundred full-throated lads shouted themselves out of breath, and quivered all over, and set once more to turn and sing and dance mincingly, laughing and rejoicing, heat rising anew to the head and desire to the heart, lie strong vodka . . . when they fell again into the slow long notes of sorrow and weeping—as a dew upon the plains!—uttering the notes of our own beloved tune, most near to the heart, instinct with mighty yearning



## POLISH SHORT STORIES

tenderness, and making all dance deliriously to the strains of our Mazovian air !

. . . . .  
The candles were growing dim, so near was the day, a dingy ashen twilight pervaded the room where they danced. But they still took their enjoyment as heartily as ever. If any found the liquor now flowing too scantily, he sent to the tavern for more vodka, sought out companions, and drank with them to his liking

Some had withdrawn, some were tired and resting awhile, some, overtaken by drink, were sleeping off its fumes in the passage or by the door, others, still more intoxicated, were stretched under the hedges. All the rest on, danced ever.

At last, some of the more sober made up a group by the porch and, beating the floor in measure, sang thus

O wedding-guests, come home !

Already sings the lark ,

The wood is deep and dark,

And ye have far to roam

Come home !

O wedding-guests, come home !

There's danger in delay

Athwart our weary way

The loud floods roll and foam:

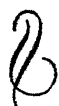
Come home !

But no one cared to listen to them and their song !





# CONTRASTS



by W. Reymont

**I**T was very dawn when Vitek, tired out by the merry-making and driven home by Yagustynka, hastened to Boryna's hut

A little watch-light was burning there, like a glow-worm Vitek looked in at the window, and beheld the old *Dziad*, Roch, sitting at the table, where he was singing hymns

The boy silently glided away to the stable, and was fumbling at the door-catch, when he jumped back with a cry of astonishment. A dog had leaped upon him, uttering a whine

"What, Lapa, Lapa? 'tis you back again, poor wretch!" he cried, and sat down on the door-step, overcome with joy—"Hungry and starving is it not so?"

He had put by a bit of sausage, saved from the feast, which he now took out of his bosom to offer the dog. But it did not care for food just then; it barked, laid its head on the lad's breast, and whined for sheer delight.

"Did they starve you, poor thing? did they drive you away?" he whispered, opening the cow-byre door, and at once throwing himself on his straw bed. "But now I shall defend and take care of you." With these words he nestled deep in the straw, and the dog, lying down beside him growled gently and licked his face.

They were both asleep in an instant.

From the stable close by, Kuba called to him in a voice weakened by illness. He called for a long time, but Vitek was sleeping like a dormouse.

After a time, however, Lapa recognized his voice, and fell to barking furiously and pulling the boy's coat.

"What's the matter?" Vitek asked sleepily.

"Water! The fever is pulling me to pieces. . . . Water!"

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

Vitek, peevish and drowsy though he was, brought him a pailful, and held it to his lips

"I am so ill, I can hardly breathe! . . . What's growling round here?"

"Why, Lapa!"

"Lapa is it?" Kuba groped, to touch the dog's head in the dark, and Lapa leaped about, frisked, and tried to get on to the bed.

"Vitek, give the horses their hay, they have been gnawing the empty mangers a long time, and I cannot move . . . Are they still dancing?" he asked a little later, when the lad was filling the racks with hay.

"They are not like to have done till noon and some are so drunk, they are lying by the roadside"

"Ah, they are enjoying themselves, the masters are!" And he sighed deeply

"Was the miller there?"

"Aye, but he left rather early"

"Many people?"

"Beyond counting . . . Why, the cabin was floverowing with them."

"Plenty for all?"

"Like manor guests! They brought them meat in such huge dishes! And vodka and beer and mead were poured out in floods! Of sausages alone, there were piles enough to fill three troughs."

"When is the bride coming?"

"This afternoon."

"They are rejoicing and feasting still. My God? I thought I'd gnaw a bone at least, and eat my fill once in my life!" . . . And here I am, lying, sighing and hearing about other people's good cheer!"

Vitek returned to his bed.

"If I could but feast my eyes on those good things!"

## CONTRASTS

He said no more, feeling weary, sad, and tormented by a sort of faint timid querulousness that gnawed at his heart now. At last, however, he spoke, patting the dog's head.

"Well, well! may they all be the better for it! Let *them* at least get some pleasure out of this life!"

The fever, increasing, began to confuse his thoughts, to drive it away, he applied himself to prayer, offering himself to the mercy of the Lord Jesus, but he could not remember what he was saying, he was dazed with sleep coming over him, and only a string of ejaculations that were prayers mingled with tears, trickled from his consciousness—the told beads of a crimson rosary!

Now and then he roused himself, but only to look around him blankly, recognizing nothing, and fall back into deathly and corpse-like unconsciousness.

Again he woke, now to groan so loud that the horses pulled at their bonds and snorted to hear him.

"O God! that I may but hold out till day!" he moaned in terror, and his eyes wandered through the window, staring out at the world and the approaching dawn, seeking the sun in that sky yet grey and lifeless and studded with paling stars.

But the day was a long distance away still.

In the stable, plunged in turbid mistiness, the horses' outlines were growing dimly visible, and the racks beneath the window slits showed like ribs in the pale glimmer.

Fall asleep again he could not the pains were torturing him anew, they felt like sharp gnarled sticks thrust into his legs, piercing, boring, stabbing in and in, and the agony became so unbearable that he started up, screaming with all his might, till Vitek woke and came round.

"I am dying! . . . Oh, how it pains! . . . How the pain swells! how it crushes me! Vitek, run for Ambrose . . . O Lord! . . . Or else call Yagustynka. . . Perhaps she can help . . . I am not able—my last hour is here . . ." He burst out weeping terribly.

Vitek, all sleepy as he was, ran to the wedding feast

The dancing was yet at its height, but Ambrose, being completely tipsy by now, had taken his station on the road opposite the cabin, where he kept reeling and singing between the road and the edge of the pond.

Vitek implored him to come, and tugged him by the sleeve, but to no purpose, the old man heard nothing understood nothing around him, singing the same song over again with obstinate repetition

Vitek then applied to Yagustynka, who was not ignorant of healing. But she was in the private room, sipping *krupnik*,<sup>1</sup> talking and chattering with her good friends so intently that she would listen to no one else. And as the boy was importunate, begging her with tears to come at once, she in the end drove him from the room. So he went back crying to the stable, having accomplished nothing

When he returned, Kuba was asleep again and he too burrowing deep in the straw and covering his head with a clout, went off to sleep

It was long after breakfast-time when he was waked by the noise of the hungry un milked cows, and by the fierce scoldings of Yagustynka, who, having overslept herself just like the others, now made up in clamour against them for what she had neglected herself.

It was only after she had got the work somewhat in swing that she went to see Kuba.

He said in a feeble voice "Pray help me and do something."

"Just you marry a young wench, and you'll be well in a trice," she began cheerily, but, seeing his livid swollen face, grew serious at once. "You need a priest more than a physician . . . What on earth can I do for you? . . . So far as I can see, you are sick unto death, aye, even unto death!"

"Must I die?"

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1. *Krupnik*—a drink made of wine, hot water, honey and spices  
—Translator's Note.

## CONTRASTS

"All's in God's hand but you'll not escape Cross-bones' clutches, I'm thinking "

"I'm to die, say you?"

"Tell me shall I send for his Reverence?"

"For his Reverence?" Kuba cried, in amazement "His Reverence to come here—to a stable—to me?"

"What of that? Think you he's made of sugar, and would melt if he came near horse-dung? It's a priest's business to go wherever they call him to a sick man "

"O Lord! how could I dare?"

"You are a silly sheep!" She shrugged her shoulders and left him.

"The woman knows not what she says," he muttered, greatly scandalized

And now he was quite alone, all the others seeming to have forgotten him

From time to time, Vitek looked into give the horses provender and water. He gave him water, too, but presently went back to the wedding. At Dominikova's they were preparing to bring the bride home.

Often Yuzka would rush in noisily, bring him a bit of cake, prattle of many things, fill the stable with racket, and run out in a hurry

Yes, and she had something to run for. Hard by they were amusing themselves fairly well the band, the shouting, the singing were to be heard through the walls.

Kuba lay motionless. A strange feeling of desolation had come over him. He merely listened, and noted how well they enjoyed themselves, and talked to Lapa, his never absent companion. They two ate Yuzka's cake together. Then the sick man called to the horses, and talked to them also. They neighed with pleasure, turning their heads round from their mangers the filly even managed to slip her halter and come to his pallet, where she caressed him putting her warm moist nose close to his face

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

"Poor dear, you have lost flesh, you have!" He patted her tenderly, and kissed her dilated nostrils. "As soon as I am well, you will fill out, even if I have to give you nothing, but oats!"

Then he lapsed once more into silence, and stared at the blackened knots in the timber walls, oozing with dark drops of resin—as it were, tears of congealed blood.

Dumb, and with feeble sunbeams, the day peeped in through the chinks, and a flood of shimmering motes appeared at the open doorway.

Hour after hour dragged by at a snail's pace, like lame, blind, and dumb beggars, crawling painfully through toil-some beds of deep sand.

Only, now and again, a few chirruping sparrows, swooping down on the stable in a noisy band, would boldly make for the mangers.

"Ah, the clever little ones!" Kuba said. "And God gives those tiny birds understanding, to find out where they can get food—Be still, you, Lapa! let the poor things feed and keep up their strength winter will presently be with them too."

The pigs now began to squeal and poke their muddled noses in at the door.

"Drive them off, Lapa! The beggars, they never have enough!"

After these, a lot of fowls came cackling to the threshold, and one large red cock was so bold as to pass over it to the baskets of provender. The others followed, but had no time to eat their fill, when a flock gagging geese drew near, hissing on the threshold, flashing their red bills, stretching and swaying to and fro their straight white necks.

"Out with them, Lapa—out with them! All those fowls—as bad as women for quarrelling!"

Suddenly there was an uproar—screaming, flapping, feathers flying as out of a torn bed. Lapa had entered well into the spirit of the chase, and came back breathless and its tongue lolling out, but uttering cries of delight.

## CONTRASTS

"Be quiet now!"

From the house there came a torrent of angry words, a sound of running, and the dragging of furniture from one room to another

"Ah, they are making ready for the bride's coming!"

Someone, though rarely, passed along the road this time it was a lumbering creaking cart, and Kuba, listening, tried to guess whose it was

"That's Klemba's wagon. One horse—ladder frame-work, going to the woods for litter, I dare say. Yes, the axle rubs against the nave, so it creaks."

Along the road there was a continual sound of footsteps, talk and noises scarcely to be heard at all, but he caught them, and made them out on the spot

"That's old Pietras, going to the tavern—Here comes Valentova, scolding someone's geese have gone on to her field, belike.—Oh, she's a vixen, not a woman! This, I think, is Kozlova, shouting as she runs—yes, it is! This Here is Peter, son of Raphael when he talks, his mouth always seems full—This is the priest's mare, going for water. . . Now she stops. . . cart-wheels blocked by stones—One of these days she will break a leg"

And so he went on, guessing at every sound he heard, going about all the village with quick thoughts and lively mental vision, and entering so into the whole life and troubles and worries of the place, he scarce noted that the day was declining, the wall darker in hue, the doorway dimmer, and the stable quite obscure.

Ambrose arrived only when evening had set in. He was as yet only partly sober, he staggered a little, and spoke so quickly it was hard to follow him.

"Hurt your leg, eh?"

"Look and see what it is."

Silently he undid the bloodstained rags, they had dried and stuck so fast to the leg that Kuba could not help shrieking as he pulled them off.



"A girl in childbed would not cry as you do!" Ambrose muttered scornfully.

"But it hurts so! How you tear me! O God!"

And Kuba all but howled.

"Oho! you have caught it finely! Was it a dog that tore your leg like that?" Ambrose cried, wondering. The leg was horribly mangled, and swollen with matter to the size of a water-can.

"It was—but pray tell no one—the forest-keeper that shot me . . ."

"Yes, I see—And hit you from afar, eh? Well, well! your leg will never again be of any use. I feel the splinters of bone rattling about. . . . Ah, why did you not call me in at once?"

"I feared . . . lest they should know I had been after a hare. . . . But I was out of the forest, when the keeper shot at me."

"Once in the tavern, he complained, someone was doing mischief, he said."

"The foul carrion! Is a hare, then, the property of anyone . . . He laid a trap for me. . . . I was in the open field, and he let fly with both barrels.—Oh, the hell-hound! —But say nothing, they would take me to the lawcourt; the gun, too, is not mine, and they would seize it at once. . . . I thought it might heal by itself.—Oh, help me! It pains so! it is tearing me to bits!"

"Ah, you cunning trickster, you! with your sly games and your forbidden quests, sharing the forest hares with the beg owners!—But, you see, this partnership will have cost you your leg!"

He examined it again, and looked sorely distressed.

"Too late, ever so much too late!"

Kuba was terrified. "Please do something for me," he moaned.

Ambrose, without replying, turned up his sleeves whip-

## CONTRASTS

ped out a very keen clasp-knife, grasped the leg firmly, and set about extracting the shots and expressing the matter

Kuba roared like a beast at the slaughter-house, till the other gagged his mouth with his sheepskin, and then he swooned with the agony of it. After dressing the wound, and applying some ointment and fresh bandages, Ambrose brought him to.

"You will have to go to the hospital," he said in a low voice

Kuba was still dazed "To the hospital?" he asked, not knowing what was said.

"They would cut off your leg, and you might get well "

"My leg?"

"Of course. It is good for nothing black—decayed—rotten "

"Cut it off?" he asked, still unable to understand

"Yes. At the knee Fear nothing mine was cut off almost at the thigh, and I am alive yet "

"Then I shall get well again, if the wounded limb is cut off"

"Even as though one should take out the pain with the hand . but you must go to the hospital "

"There . . . there they cut and carve living men's bodies!—Cut it off you I'll pay whatsoever you will, but cut it off!—To the hospital I will not go. I prefer dying here!"

"Then here you will die. None but a doctor can cut it off for you. I am off to the Voyt's at once, he will send you to town in a cart to-morrow."

"No use I will not go," he replied, stubbornly

"Fool! do you think they will ask your leave?"

The old man went out, and Kuba said to himself  
"When it is cut off, I shall be well."

After the dressing, his leg had ceased to pain. But it was numb as far up as the groin, and he felt a tingling all along his side this he did not notice, plunged in thought as he was.

"I should recover—Yes, I surely should. Ambrose has nothing left him of his leg all he walks on is wooden. And he said 'As though one should take the pain out with his hand.'—But then, Boryna would turn me away. . . Aye, a farm-hand with but one leg—such a one cannot plough, nor do aught else,—what would become of me? I should have to tend cattle . . . or beg my bread! Wander about, or sit at some church-door—O Lord merciful Lord!" And on a sudden his position flashed clearly upon him, and under the horror that now assailed him he even sat up. And then he uttered a deep cry of impotent agony, his mind rolling in an abyss from which he saw no issue. "O Jesus, Jesus!" he repeated in a fever of excitement, quaking in every limb.

Long did he shriek and struggle thus in his anguish but in the midst of those tears and that despair, a certain resolve was slowly shaping itself, and he brooded more and more deeply. Little by little, he grew calmer, more at peace, thinking so profoundly that he heard nothing around him, though surrounded by the din of instruments and songs and clamour, just as if he had been in a deep sleep.

It was then that the bride and the wedding guests arrived at Boryna's house.

They had led away a goodly cow, and sent Yagna's box and feather-bed, and various articles that she had received as wedding presents, before her in a cart.

And now, just a little after sun down, the procession left Dominikova's cabin, as darkness was falling and the mists rising up.

Playing lustily, the band marched in front, then Yagna went on, still in her wedding dress, and conducted by her mother and friends; last of all, and without any order, came the ruck of guests, each in the place he had chosen.

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Their way wound along by the pond, now darkened, its gleaming quenched in the ever-thickening folds of the fog, the silence and obscurity growing blacker and more dead, the tramping and music sounding muffled and, as it were, from underneath the water

From time to time one of the younger folk broke out into song, or a matron took up a stave, or one of the peasant lads cried "Da dana," but it was only a short outburst.

They were as yet in no merry mood, and, besides, they were chilled to the marrow by the bleak damp air

Only when they turned in to Boryna's enclosure did the bridesmaids lift their voices in a sad farewell

Wedding her way to her wedding,  
The maiden wept  
Then lit they tapers four,  
And played upon the organ—  
Didst fancy, maiden,  
That they would play for ever?  
—A little yesterday, to-day a little,  
And after, thou shalt weep for all thy life !  
Da dana ! All thy life !

Before the threshold, and under the porch, Boryna was waiting along with Yuzka and the young men

Dominkova came forward first of all, carrying in a bundle a piece of bread, a pinch of salt, a little charcoal, some wax from a Candlemas taper, and a handful of ears of corn, blessed on Assumption Day. As Yagna passed the threshold, the matrons cast behind her threads plucked from cloth seams, and the peels of hempstalks, that the Evil One might find no entrance, but all things thrive with her !

They greeted, kissed, and pledged one another in cups of mead, with wishes of luck, health and all good gifts and blessings when they entered and filled the whole room, every bench and nook and corner

The players tuned their instruments, and then strummed softly, so as not to interfere with the feast that Boryna was now giving

He simply went from matron to matron with a full goblet in hand, offering, pressing them to partake, gathering them in his arms, and drinking to each of them, the blacksmith took his place with the others

Yuzka was bearing on platters pieces of a cake she had baked with curds and honey on purpose to please her father.

All the same, the party was dull. True they emptied their glasses as in duty bound, nor did they turn away from the sausages. Nay, they even drank plentifully and with due zest only there was no mirth amongst them.

The women too, who as a class are inclined to diversions and pastimes, now only sat still on the benches, or here and there in corners, not even talking much amongst themselves.

Yagna went into the private room, where she undressed. Returning in her everyday costume, she would have done the honours of the cabin and treated her guests herself, but that her mother would not let her touch anything.

"Darling, enjoy your wedding-day now ! You'll yet have work enough and enough toil !" And again and again did she weep over her most tenderly, and clasp her to her bosom.

The company found matter for laughter in this maternal sentimentality of hers their jeers being all the sharper that now, on Yagna's arrival as mistress in her husbands' home, owner of so much land and property of every sort, her new position was brought home to them. Many a mother, with yet unmarried daughters, felt very bitter against her; many a girl was choked with bile at the thought.

They went over to survey the other apartments, where Antek had formerly lived with his family. There Eva and Yagustynka had prepared a grand supper and made a roaring fire. Vitek had hardly been able to bring logs enough and place them under the enormous pots

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They examined all the premises besides, and ran their envious eyes over all that there was to be seen

The house itself, to begin with, was the first in the whole village large, conspicuous, tall, with rooms (they fancied) as good as those in a manor-house whitewashed, and with boarded floors! Then how numerous the household articles and utensils were! In the big room, too, there were a score of holy images and all of them glazed! And then, the byre, the stable, the granary, the shed! Five cows were kept there, to say nothing of the bull—no small source of profit. And the horses, and the geese, and the swine—and, above all, the land!

Eaten up with envy, they sighed deeply, and one said to another

"Lord! and to think that all this goes to one that is undeserving!"

"Oh! they knew well how to bring their pigs to market!"

"Yes, he that goes to meet luck always finds it."

"Why should your Ullia have missed this chance?"

"Because she fears God and leads an honest life."

"And all the rest do the same!"

"Oh, were the other than she is, folk would not stand it of her. Let them but meet her once at night in company with a lad, and all the world will know!"

"What luck this one has!"

"'Tis the fruit of shamelessness."

"Come along!" Andrew called out, interrupting their talk. "The music is playing, and not one petticoat is in the room—nobody to dance with!"

"A mind to dance you have, but will your mother let you?"

"So eager?—Beware and let not your trousers fall, boy. 'twere no fair sight!"

"Nor trip the dancers up with your legs!"

"Pair of with Valentova, you'll make a fine couple of scarecrows!"

Andrew rapped out an oath, took hold of the first girl he came across, and led her off, paying no heed to the wasps humming behind him

There were but few couples in the room as yet, and these danced but slowly and (it seemed) with little zeal. Nastka and Simon Paches were the only exception, and frisked about very willingly. They had arranged matters beforehand and, with the opening sounds of the music, had joined in close union, and bounced about in scrupulous fulfilment of their promise

But no sooner had the Voyt come in (he was late, having had to go with the recruits to the District Barracks) than he began to make things look more lively, drinking deep, talking with all the farmers present, and cracking jokes with the newly-wedded couple

"Why, your bride is as red as her skirt, and you are as white as a sheet!"

"You'll not say that to-morrow."

"Matthias, experienced as you are, you surely have not wasted a day."

"Nay, with all eyes upon him? Fie! the man is no gander."

"I would not bet half a quart that you say true. You know throw but a pebble into the bush out flies the bird! 'Tis the Voyt tells you so!"

Yagna made her escape from the room, which occasioned a loud guffaw

The women then proceeded to wag their tongues very much at their ease, careless of what they said

The hubbub swelled, and the guests grew more good-humoured in proportion. Boryna, bottle in hand, went several times the round of the company, the dancers, now more numerous, frisked with livelier steps, and begun

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to stamp and sing, and circle about the room in wider rounds.

Then did Ambrose make his appearance and, sitting down (nearly at the threshold), follow the bottle with wistful eyes, as it went its way.

The Voyt cried to him "You never turn your head, except towards the clinking of glasses "

"Because of that same clinking! he answered "And he has merit who gives to drink to them that thirst."

"You leather bottle! here's water for you!"

"What's good for cattle may be bad for man. They say. 'Water to drink is now and then not bad, but harm from vodka no one ever had!'"

"Here's vodka for you since you discourse so well "

"You first, Voyt!—They say too Water for a christening, vodka for a wedding, and tears for a death!"

"Well said drink another."

"I should not even shirk a third. For my first wife always take one, but two for my second!"

"Why so?"

"Because she died in time for me to seek a third."

"What! Still dreaming about women, and his old eyes see no more as soon as twilight comes!"

"It is not always necessary to see "

At this, they laughed uproariously, and the women cried out

"For the love of wine and of talk, they are both well matched."

"There's a saying: 'A wife good in talk, and a man strong in deed, have every chance in the world to succeed.'"

The Voyt had now sat down by Ambrose, the others crowding round, as many as could find seats, or, if they could not, standing about with little heed to the dancers' convenience.



And then began such a running fire of witty sayings, jests, comic tales, and joyous banter, that they all shook with laughter. In this field, Ambrose was the recognized leader, and chaffed his hearers to their very faces with so much humour and fun and that they were like to split their sides. Amongst the women, Vachnikova yielded to none for drollery, she played first fiddle in that respect, with the Voyt for bass-viol, so far as his official dignity permitted.

The musicians sawed away as hard as they could, and scraped out the liveliest tunes they had, and the dancers were shuffling along as fast, and shouting, and screaming, and tapping with nimble heels. Blithe and delighted, they had forgotten the rest of the world, when one of them chanced to notice Yankel standing outside in the passage. At once they pulled him into the room. The Jew took off his cap, with amicable bows and salutations to all present, and taking no notice of the nicknames showered up him."

"Yellow one!—Unchristened one!—Son of a mare!"

"You be quiet there!" cried the Voyt. "Let us treat him! Here, a glass of the best vodka!"

"I was passing along the road, and wanted to see how you husbandmen divert yourselves—God reward you, Mr. Voyt—I'll take a drop of vodka—why should I not?—to the health of the newly-wedded pair!"

Boryna raised the bottle and invited Yankel, who after, wiping the glass with the skirt of his capote, covered his head, and tossed off one glass, followed by a second.

"Stay a bit, Yankel, it will not make you unclean," they cried out in a merry vein. "Here musicians, play us the Jewish dance, and Yankel will caper to it!"

"Yes, I may dance, why not? 'Tis no sin."

But ere the players had understood what was wanted of them, Yankel slipped quietly into the passage, and vanished in the yard. He had come to get back his gun.

They scarce noticed his exit. Ambrose had all the time gone on with his entertainment, to which Vachnikova contributed a violoncello accompaniment, so to speak. And he

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continued until super-time, when the music ceased, the tables were pushed forward, and the clatter of dishes was heard yet they still listened and he still held forth

Boryna invited them to sup, but without effect Yagna asked them again and again. The Voyt only got her into the circle, made her sit down by him, and held her by the hand.

It was Yasyek (nicknamed Topsy-tuivy) who bellowed out "Come, good folk, and set to the dishes are cooling"

"Hold your tongue, blockhead, or lick the dishes with it"

"Old Ambrose! You are lying like a gipsy, and fancy we don't know it!"

"Yasyek, take what folk put into your mouth you're good at that But leave me alone, you are no match for me!"

"No match! Just you try, then!" the foolish lad shouted He thought Ambrose meant fighting.

"An ox could do all you can . . . or more!"

Ambrose was of-ended, and growled "Let a calf into church, he'll come out just as he was,—Idiot!"

Yasyek's mother attempted to stand up for her son He went off to table first of all, and soon the others took their places in a hurry, for the cooks had brought in the smoking dishes, and the odour filled the room.

They seated themselves in order of precedence, as was fitting for the bride's installation ceremony Dominikova and her sons in the middle, bridesmen and bridesmaids together, Boryna and Yagna remained standing to serve the guests, and see that all was done properly

A quiet interval succeeded, save that the brats outside made a noise at the window, fighting with one another, and Lapa barked in great excitement about the house and passages. The company were quiet and decorous, while they worked hard to put the eatables away only their spoons

tinkled about the rims of the dishes, and the glasses jingled going round.

Yagna was continually busy, setting some particular dainty before each guest. Here it was meat, there some other very good thing. And she begged them all so courteously not to stint themselves, and behaved with such natural grace conquering all hearts with her beauty and the pleasant words she said, that many of the men present could not but gaze on her in adoration, and her mother even laid down her spoon to look and rejoice in her daughter.

Boryna, too, noticed this, and when she happened to go to the kitchen, followed, caught up with her in the passage, gave her a mighty hug, and kissed her enthusiastically.

"Dear, what a housewife you make!—Like a man-of-house lady—so dignified and so pleasing in everything!"

"Am I not, eh?—Now run away to the room. Gulbas and Simon are sitting apart, grumpy and eating little. Get them to drink with you!"

He obeyed, and did all she wanted. And Yagna felt now strangely blithe of heart, and full of affection. She knew herself the mistress of the house, knew that power had somehow got into her hands and therewith she was aware of an accession of authority and serenity and strength. She walked about the place at ease, eyed all she saw with keen understanding, and managed things as though she had been married ever so long.

"What she is, the old man will find out soon enough, and that's his business, but to my mind there are in her the makings of a housewife—and a fine one, too!" was Eva's muttered remark to Yagustynka.

"A fool that's in favour will always be clever," the latter returned bitterly. "Things will go on as they are till she has had too much of the old man, and begins again running after young fellows."

"Aye, Matthew is lying in wait he has not given her up."

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"But give her up he will! Somebody else will make him!"

"Boryna?"

"Boryna?" She smiled a crafty smile "No someone yet mightier I mean—no time will show, and you will see.—Vitek! Drive that dog away it barks and barks till my ears are aching And drive those boys away too they will be breaking the panes, or doing some mischief"

Vitek rushed out with a stick The dog barked no more But there were cries without, and the noisy footfall of a crowd of flying urchins He drove them into the road, and ran back, bent double to escape a shower of missiles that assailed him

Roch showed himself in the shade at the corner of the yard. "Vitek, wait a little. Call thou Ambrose, say I want him very urgently indeed, and am awaiting him in the porch."

It was only after some time that Ambrose appeared, and in a detestable humour His supper had been interrupted, and at the very best dish of all—sucking-pig with peas.

"What? what? Is the church on fire?"

"Do not raise your voice so Come to Kuba I fear he is dying"

"Oh, let him die, then, and not prevent folk from eating their supper! I was with him only this very evening, and told him he would have to go to the hospital, and get his leg cut off, and he would be well in a trice"

"You told him that?—Oh, then I understand . . I—I think he has cut off his own leg!"

"Jesu Maria!—His—his own leg?"

"Come instantly and look. I was going to sleep in the cow-byre, and had just entered the yard, when Lapa came barking to me, and jumping, and pulling me by my capote. I could not make out what it wanted, but it ran forward, sat down on the stable threshold, and howled. Thither I .

went and saw Kuba lying in the doorway, half in, half out. I thought at first he had gone to get some air, and fainted on the way so I carried him back to his pallet, and lit the lantern to get him some water, and it was then I saw he was bloodstained all over—deathly pale, and with blood pouring from his leg.”

They went in, and Ambrose did his very best to bring Kuba to, but the poor fellow was extremely weak. He scarce drew breath, and a rattling sound came through his teeth, clenched so fast that, to give him a little water, they had to prize them open with a knife.

The leg, which had been hewn off at the knee, and still dangled by a shred of skin, bled profusely.

A great pool of gore lay on the threshold, close to a bloodstained ax and the grindstone, usually placed under the caves, now fallen near the doorway.

“Aye, he has cut it off himself. Afraid of the hospital—A fool to think it would avail him, but dauntless and resolute all the same—Good God! his own leg! . . . it is simply incredible. And the blood he has lost!”

At this juncture, Kuba opened his eyes, and looked round him with returning consciousness.

“Is it off? . . . I struck twice, but swooned——” he said feebly.

“Any pain?”

“None at all. Weak as water, but not ailing.”

Ambrose dressed, washed and bound the leg with moist rags, Kuba lay still meanwhile, uttering not the least sound.

Roch, on his knees, held the lantern, praying fervently the while, but the patient smiled—a faint, tearful smile, as when an orphan babe, abandoned afield, knows only that his mother is not there, not that she has forsaken him, and enjoys the grass waving over his head, and the sunbeams, and stretches out his hands to the birds that fly past, conversing with all around him after his fashion, even so did he feel now. He was at ease, without pain and in comfort,

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so cheerful that he thought no whit of his ill, but felt secretly rather proud of himself. How sharp he had ground the ax! how well he had placed the limb on the threshold, and—one blow not sufficing—struck a second with all his might! And now the pain was all gone, so of course he had succeeded—Oh, if he were but a trifle stronger, would not lie totting on that pollet any more, but be up, and go to the wedding—dance even—and eat a morsel, for he would fain eat!

"Lie you still, and do not budge. I will tell Yuzka, and you shall have something to eat presently." So said Roch, patting his cheeks, and he went out into the yard with Ambrose.

"He will drop off ere morning—asleep like a little bird, there's no blood in him."

"Then, while he is conscious, the priest must be sent for."

"His Reverence has gone to spend the evening at the manoi-house at Vola."

"I'll go and tell him there must be no delay."

"Five miles on foot and through the forest! You would never be in time—No, the carts of those guests here who leave after supper are ready, take one and go."

They got a cart on to the road, and Roch seated himself.

"Do not forget Kuba!" he called out as he started. "Have a care of him!"

"Yes, yes, I shall remember, and not leave him by himself."

Nevertheless, he did forget him almost directly. After telling Yuzka about the eatables, he went back to supper, and applied himself so close to the bottle that he very soon remembered nothing at all . . .

Yuzka, being a kind-hearted little girl, at once brought him all she could get, piling it up on a dish, with half a quart of vodka.

"Here, Kuba, is something for you, that ye may eat and enjoy yourself."

POLISH SHORT STORIES

"God bless you!—Sausage it is, I fancy,—a delightful smell!"

"I fried it for you, that you might find it more savoury." She put the dish into his hands, for the stable was dark "But drink of the vodka first"

He drained the glass to the last drop

"Will you sit with me a little? I feel lonely here."

He broke the food, bit and chewed it— but could swallow nothing

"Are they in good spirits over there?"

"Oh, yes! and so many people! I never saw more company in all my life"

"Of course, of course," he said, proudly, "is it not Boryna's wedding?"

"Yes, and Father is so pleased. . . and always going after Yagna!"

"Indeed, for she is so beautiful— as fair to see as a Manor-house lady any day"

"Do you know, Simon, Dominikova's son, is taken with Naska!"

"His mother will forbid him. There are only three acres of land at Nastka's, and ten mouths to feed."

"That's why she keeps strict watch and drives them apart when she finds them together."

"Is the Voyt here?"

"He is—Talking a great deal and—together with Ambrose—making the company laugh"

"And why not, being at so great a wedding, and with so great a man?—Do you know anything of Antek's doings?"

"Ah, I ran over to him at dusk, with cake and meat and bread for the little ones. But he turned me out, and threw the things after me. He is very resolute, and fierce Oh, so fierce! And there is wailing and misery in their

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hovel Hanka is always quarrelling with her sister, and they have well-nigh come to blows ”

He made no reply, but breathed somewhat harder

“Yuzka,” he said after a while, “the mare !—I hear her moaning Since evening she has been lying down she must be near foaling-time, and ought to be looked after. Prepare a mash for her —Hark how she moans ! And I cannot help at all, so weak I feel—quite helpless !”

He was worn out, and said no more for a while seeming to be asleep

Yuzka rose and went out in a hurry

“Ces, Ces, Ces !” he called to the mare as he woke suddenly

The mare uttered a low whinny, and tugged at her halter till the chain clanked again

“So then, once in my life at least, I shall eat and be filled ! Aye, and you too, good dog, shall get your share no need to whine ”

He attempted once more to swallow some sausage, but quite in vain it stuck in his throat

“Lord, Lord, such heaps of food . and I cannot so much as eat mouthful !”

Yes it was utterly useless he could not His hand fell powerless, and still grasping the meat, he put it underneath the straw of his bed

“So much ! Never so much yet ! And all for nothing !”  
—He felt rather sore

“But let me rest a little now, and later, when I can eat, the feast shall begin.”

He was just as unable afterwards, and slipped off into a coma, still holding the sausage, and unaware that Lapa was stealthily gnawing at it

Suddenly his senses returned.—The supper was over, and such a blast of music burst on his ears from over the



yard, that the stable-walls vibrated, and the frightened fowls fell a-cackling on their roosts.

The dance was in full and boisterous swing—and the laughter and the frolic and the fun. Again and again the trampling of feet resounded, and the shrill cries of the lasses pierced the night.

At first, Kuba gave ear, but presently he became oblivious of all things. A drowsiness seized upon him, and carried him off into, as it were, a clangorous darkness, as though beneath swift swirling murmurous waters. But when the dance grew noisier, and the tumult and hubbub of the stamping heels seemed about to beat all to shivers, he stirred slightly. His soul peered up out of the dungeon where it lay, roused from oblivion, coming back from infinite distances, it listened.

At such times, Kuba would endeavour to eat a little, or whispered low, but from the heart

“Ceska, Ces, Ces!”

And now at last his soul was slowly withdrawing—winging its way through the universal frame of things. A new fledged bird divine, it fluttered around uncertainly at first, unable to soar, and at times with a revival of attachment to that sacred earth, its body, where it fain would rest from the weariness of flight, and craved to soothe the pangs of bereavement in the haunts of men. Back it went on earth amongst his own, its loved ones, calling sorrowfully to its brethren, and imploring their aid but after a time, strengthened by the Divine power and mercy, it was enabled to soar on high, even unto those myserious fields of endless spring, those infinite unbounded fallows which God has made beautiful with everlasting sunbeams and eternal joy.

And higher yet it flew, and higher, yet higher, higher—yea, till it set its feet—

Where man can hear no longer the voice of lamentation, nor the mournful discords of all things that breathe—

Where only fragrant lilies exhale balmy odours, where fields of flowers in bloom waft honey-sweet scents athwart

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the air, where starry rivers roll over beds of a million hues,  
where night comes never at all——

Where silent prayers go up for ever, like smoke of incens,  
in odoriferous clouds, and the bells tinkle, and the organ plays softly,  
and the ransomed people—Angels and Saints together—sing the Lord's praises in the Holy Church,  
the divine and lasting City !

Yes, worn out and longing to be at rest, thither did the  
soul of Kuba fly away !

. . . . .

But in the house they all were dancing—enjoying themselves with the heartiest mirth and the best goodwill Better still than the evening before the good cheer being dealt out more generously, and the hosts more pressing. And so they danced till they could dance no more.

The place was in commotion, like a cauldron set upon a great fire Did the enjoyment show any signs of flagging, at once the band set to with renewed zeal and the guests, like a field stirred by the wind and waving, sprang up and began to dance anew with fresh fire and song and din and tumult.

Now were their souls quite melted within them by the volcanic enthusiasm of their host, their blood seethed hot, reason was almost giving way, their hearts were beating with the wildest frenzy. For them, every movement now seemed a dance, every cry a song, and every look a glance of ecstasy !

And so it went on all night long, and even till morning. But the day rose, dull and still, the days of dawn appeared together with dense dreary masses of clouds Ere the sun had risen, the world grew very dark and dismal. And then the snow came down at first whirling, fluttering, scanty—as when the needles fall from pine-trees on a windy day; until it set to falling in earnest.

Then, as though coming through a sieve, the snow descended in perpendicular flakes, straight down, equally dealt out, monotonous, noiseless, covering roofs, trees and hedges

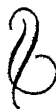
## POLISH SHORT STORIES

and all the land, as with an enormous covering of white feathers

The wedding was really at an end at last. True, they were to meet again at the tavern in the evening, "to wind up", but for the present they decided to return home.

Only the bridesmen and bridesmaids, with the band to lead them, drew up in the porch and sang in unison a short song, in which, declaring themselves the devoted servants of the wedded couple, they wished them good night—in the morning!

It was then that Kuba laid his soul at the sacred feet of the Lord Jesus. . .



# HOW TO ESCAPE?

By J. M. Herbert

I MET PRYSZCZYK in the camp at Targu-Jiu during the first few days of my stay there. He hugged and kissed me in the presence of the Rumanian staff, embraced me so vigorously that I lost my breath, and began to cry from emotion. Then completely ignoring the Rumanians, he dragged me to his barracks where he had an upper bunk in a corner. He smoked one after another of my cigarettes, treated the soldiers all around to them and talked.

He had been caught, "they" caught him; not any Rumanians, a German "secret agent." And everything was our Embassy's fault. If only he had travelled alone, he would certainly be in France by now and maybe he would be driving the car of General Sikorski himself.

He looked at me slyly to see whether I would defend the Embassy and whether this assignment to the General's service did not seem too incredible to me. But I was highly amused and had no intention of doubting his words though it clearly appeared from his story that Pryszczyk was suffering not through the Embassy's fault but because of his incurable gallantry toward the ladies.

This is what had happened.

In Bucharest Pryszczyk was given a passport by sergeant Krówka, who was "well connected" with the Polish military attaches. He received the passport illegally, of course but, like Krowka himself, he did not want to await his turn.

As for Krowka, I had known him when he was a sergeant in the Pilots' Training Centre at Cracow in 1919. At that he was a chief sergeant or staff sergeant as they were called then. I was not surprised that he had not been promoted since but I often wondered who could ever have made him an N. C. O. in the Austrian army from whence he came to us.

Krowka was big, sturdy, in the face, with a reddish growth of beard, dumb as a log, but he had a very high opinion of his intelligence and military knowledge accumulated through the years he had spent in the regimental office. Actually his knowledge was limited to the service regulations which he knew by heart, and his intelligence was mostly displayed in the use expressions straight from the official correspondence. What is more, he did not always understand these stylistic fineries and applied them in his speeches rather freely, when giving us moral lessons, admonitions or reading out the daily orders for the training centre. We were all fond of him for he was not a bad fellow and treated us with a kind of fatherly indulgence.

Once he said to me when he saw me sitting on a table in the N. C. O.'s mess "You, volunteer Herbert what is the matter with you? Yesterday I saw you eating at the above mentioned table, today I see you sit on it, and tomorrow? Tomorrow maybe I will see you making a latrine of the above mentioned barracks piece of furniture, what?"

"The above mentioned volunteers should be shaved and have their hair cut in their own capacity," was the phraseology of one of his famous orders.

And this was the companion whom fate gave Pryszczyk at the beginning of his escapade. Judging by further developments, Sergeant Krowka had not changed much since the days when he was our staff sergeant. This good heart and knowledge of service regulations would not have helped him much in Rumania, but Pryszczyk promised to guide him in gratitude for the illegal passport which he supplied.

They learned that in order to obtain a foreign visa you must first have a "plecara" or Rumanian exit permit, so they went together to the police station and insinuated themselves into the presence of the chief dignitary who was signing these "plecaras."

The dignitary, like all of his kind, took enormous bribes wholesale, per head, and did not care much who left Rumania. Seeing Krowka and Pryszczyk he took their pass-

## HOW TO ESCAPE?

ports, looked at them, read in the column "profession" that both Pryszczyk and Krowka were engineers, smiled kindly and expressed astonishments that there were so many engineers among the Poles leaving his country. Pryszczyk also smiled and—so he told me—answered in French that there were many of them. Krowka did not answer anything, he did not understand what it was all about and besides he could not speak French.

Then the dignitary discreetly mentioned the Polish forces in France. Pryszczyk developed goose flesh, the topic was a dangerous one.

"Tell me openly," the dignitary said to Krowka. "You are not an engineer at all, only a major or a captain in the Polish army?"

"Everything is lost," thought Pryszczyk, and seeing that Krowka could only stare and breathe heavily, he answered resignedly

"This gentleman is a general "

This made a big impression. The police official became at once extremely courteous. He leaped to his feet, gave Krowka a chair, stamped the passports at once and handed them with a bow to the astounded sergeant. He was so respectful and talked so much and so quickly that Pryszczyk felt quite dizzy. He nudged his companion and murmured "Serge, let's go!" And went out with him, forgetting to say goodbye to the high official.

But this was the best move; the dignitary followed them scolded the porter and the gendarmes, told the customers to make way for the honourable general, and loudly apologized for being so late in recognizing the high quality of the officer.

Krowka, convinced that he wanted to take the passports from them, dragged Pryszczyk along and ran at full speed down the marble stairs.

Nobody followed them, however, so Pryszczyk began to act again. First of all he exchanged all the Polish currency they had into lei at a good, official exchange rate,

presenting six official documents in several banks, then he bought food for the journey, raising money wherever he could, at the Red Cross, at the military attache's office and at the Embassy. At last he brought Krowka to the station, bought tickets to Constanza and occupied a whole second class compartment, locking the door from inside.

They arrived at Constanza without mishap, and this is where our Embassy exposed Pryszczyk to danger, for he let himself be persuaded to travel with a whole transport of Poles.

It must have been easy to persuade him, for a such trip cost nothing. The two men received accommodations and food for three days, and on the fourth day they were sent to the port, together with forty other "engineers."

At the maritime station there was a crowd of policemen and gendarmes, but Pryszczyk did not care, for he knew very well that they were paid by our officials. However, he was worried by the German secret police in mufti whom he could not tell from other civilians. "Mr Ambassador" from the consulate at Constanza warned every one not to talk Polish before embarkation. So Pryszczyk set his teeth and decided not to open his mouth. They stood there for perhaps an hour and were terribly bored. Then a boat came alongside and the passengers began to land. And misfortune had it that a girl passed near Pryszczyk.

"She had legs, sir, I tell you! Krolikowski here can witness to it."

Krolikowski confirmed the fact.

"And, of course, she let her glove fall when she passed me. So I pick it up and say 'Pardon, sil voo play!' And she says, 'merci bien!' Then I say, 'Please, madame, it's quite alright.' When she hears this, she begins to shout 'Vooz etes Polonais' and something else about this nationality business. And Krolikowski here gives me a wink to remind me we are not supposed to say anything about it. So I says her to calmly 'But no, madame, no Polonais' But it was too late, for one of them agents, a secret German,

approaches us and starts a terrible row with those Rumanian bastards”

The row finished fatally for Pryszczyk. They found a revolver and a military identity card on him, and as his passport, too, was not quite in order, the “engineer” was walked off, under escort, straight to prison. He spent almost two months there, then was transferred to Targu-Jiu under a special guard, robbed of his money, beaten and left thin as a stick.

In spite of this, Pryszczyk did not lose his natural spirits. He did not even bear a grudge against the Rumanians but he was more infuriated with the German secret police than ever before.

“And I don’t want to have anything to do with any ambassadors,” he declared finally. “When we escaped with you, sir, and with Captain Wasilewski, no ambassador had anything to say and everything went O. K., didn’t it?”

I asked him about his plans for the future and expressed some astonishment that he had not attempted to escape yet. With an expressive gesture he pointed to his rags and to his pockets full of holes.

“But since the captain is here, everything will be fine,” he assured his companions.

I could not protest, so Pryszczyk became quite enthusiastic and began a laudatory oration in my praise. I left the room after the first few sentences, not wanting to tell him plainly that he was lying, for in this epic he had adopted the very convenient plural form. I did manage to hear, however, how the two of us had evacuated the whole depot of Deblin and how in the thick of the fighting we had crossed the bridge on the Vistula and almost reached the German positions.

Soon afterwards I gave Pryszczyk a decent uniform in exchange for his rags and tried to do something for him, not only to justify his high opinion of myself and the confidence he had in me but also because I had a plan with regard to him. These favors to him benefited his whole company, for Pryszczyk was a good comrade, cared a lot



about his pals and always wanted things done for them. As to the plan, I wanted him to become the driver of Colonel Porfirianu's car.

Porfirianu had a service conveyance, an enormous Chevrolet which in the hands of his Rumanian chauffeur was constantly out of order and mostly under repair. Porfirianu felt strongly that everything Polish was infinitely better than anything Rumanian. He believed that a Polish driver would know how to cope with the old car but was afraid that he would escape at the first opportunity even if there were two Rumanians on guard. All this would have been of little concern to me were it not for the fact that the Chevrolet had an enormous luggage hold at the back.

A man whom we wanted quickly and safely out of the camp could easily get into the hold, I thought, and in such a hold I could bring a whole mass of civilian clothes into the camp.

So I offered Pryszczyk to Colonel Porfirianu, guaranteeing that he would not escape as long as he held this post. Porfirianu accepted my word of honour.

Pryszczyk himself presented a more difficult problem; he did not want even to hear about it.

"So you have helped me, sir, only because you want me to sit here indefinitely? So now I am to drive this Rumanian monkey and cannot budge because of your word of honour? Where is the sense of it?"

At last he let himself be persuaded but he made me promise that every other passenger in the luggage hold would be one of his pals. I had to agree to this, what could I do?

"But no silly tricks, Pryszczyk," I said. "You are not to escape without my permission. Will you promise?"

He was indignant.

"What are you saying, sir? Would I make a fool of you, sir, just to pull the leg of the Rumanians? When I am ready to escape you will see a good performance, I promise you, sir. It will be great fun, sir, you will see!"

I must say that he kept his promise. He pulled the leg of the Rumanians as no one else could have done it although the organisation never lacked ideas for single and mass escapes. He made a laughing stock of the Rumanians and it was great fun. It will pass, I am sure, if not into history, at least into the authentic anecdotes of the country.

The men escaped from Targu-Jiu by all possible means. The simplest and most usual method consisted of digging at night through the snow under the barbed wire and crawling out of sight of the closely posted Rumanian sentries. The fugitives used white sheets stolen from the hospital during their flight. They wore, of course, civilian clothes. Then across fields and untrodden paths they reached the town, went into "evacuation" outposts previously organised by us, left the sheets there, received the prepared passports, money and railway tickets, and were forwarded farther on from railway stations chosen by our intelligence.

Apart from this, mass escapes always happened on occasions such as a common march to the public baths or funerals of soldiers who had died in the camp. From such ceremonies only half of those who took part in them came back, in spite of strong Rumanian guards who were there to prevent escapes. A terrible row would ensue. Porfirianu would forbid any more baths or attendance at funerals, after which complaints would be sent to Bucharest on the "inhuman" treatment of the Poles, the Polish, British and French Embassies would intervene, and everything revert to its normal order. The Polish commanders of groups within the camps impatiently awaited their turn to take their men for a bath or quarrelled about delegations to the funerals of "their" dead. In one week as many as three soldiers died (which in a camp of five thousand men was not so extraordinary as it may appear). An officer who had succeeded in getting ride of a large number of his men stood rubbing his hands happily.

"Well, well, this is quite nice," he said, "If only we could have three funerals every week!"

But Pryszczyk smiled contemptuously when any one

mentioned these ordinary escapes in his presence.

"That's no fun," he declared.

Individual exploits ranked higher in his estimation.

To these belonged the "kidnapping" of a whole detachment, some 120 men, by their Polish commander, a young officer who some time earlier (probably not fully realising what he was doing) had signed a declaration that he would not leave Rumania. This officer, in accordance with the regulations, marched his detachment every day to drill exercises. This practice was much admired by Colonel Porfirianu and all the other Rumanians, for the young officer was the only commander who scrupulously conformed to the regulations. The uninitiated Poles wondered why these soldiers wanted to drill, for none but this detachment had any sort of physical training.

After a fortnight we began to change the drill enclosure into a sports ground and the detachment had no place to drill. The dutiful commander lost no time, led his detachment, singing loudly, through the camp gates, to the meadows. The sentry, seeing a marching formation, did not protest, satisfied that everything was in order since Porfirianu stood near the gate and looked on with satisfaction at the martial appearance of the parading soldiers. He continued to look on while the lieutenant drilled in the fields, "left turn march" and "two first rows turn right," then he nodded his head in appreciation and went to his office. The lieutenant, however, once more ordered "four turn right," then "follow me" and "march"—which was against the rules.

They marched across the field, reached the highway, passed the town, turned into a road and after a nineteen hours march, found themselves at Turnu-Severin, very close to the Yugoslav frontier. I need not add that not a single one of the soldiers returned to Targu-Jiu. They left quickly for France, for our evacuation office at Turnu-Severin acted very efficiently.

I must say, however, that the lieutenant commanding the detachment did return. He reported dutifully to

## HOW TO ESCAPE?

Porfirianu who almost had a stroke on seeing him, and explained calmly that his detachment had definitely refused to stop their march.

"And you will understand, sir, I am sure, that I could not possibly leave my soldiers. I had follow them, and follow them I did to the bitter end. I only stopped at the frontier, but as I had signed this unfortunate declaration, sir, here I am. Were it not for this . . ."

"Then what would you do?" should Porfirianu

The lieutenant straightened himself, clicked his heels and said

"I must say, sir, that I would have followed them to France!"

All these methods of escape must pale into insignificance when compared with the incredible exploit of Pryszczyk. The recklessness of it, when you consider the simplicity of the means he employed in preparing his escape is typical of his deviltry and also of the intelligence of the Rumanian army. For Pryszczyk did escape or, more accurately, did walk out of the camp in his uniform, accompanied by three of his closest friends under the very noses of the Rumanian officers, the commander of the guards and the sentries who made way for him. No one realised that Pryszczyk was actually escaping. No one tried to stop him. No one even protested,

Beyond doubt the prototype of Pryszczyk's plan was the "kidnapping" of a whole company by its commander. I remember that at the time Pryszczyk was full of praise for the lieutenant.

"Very analogically thought out," he declared, and falling deep in thought, he was silent for a long while, which was for him a very exceptional thing.

I am not sure whether he elaborated his plan then, or whether he did it later, in any case he had to concoct a more complicated plan in circumstances much less favorable, during a period of temporary deterioration in our relations with the Rumanians.

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

It happened three months after Pryszczyk was entrusted with the driving of Porfirianu's car. One day he came to me very worried and began to talk about the weather. Spring was near, he said, and there was almost no snow, never in his life had he seen so much mud. He then informed me that spring air was very treacherous for it was full of "rheumatisms" which attack people, and he, Pryszczyk was very prone to "rheumatisms"

I knew of course what was the purpose of this speech so I asked him straight away what was on his mind.

"On my mind?" he wondered, lifting his eyebrows and wrinkling his brow. "Nothing of the kind, sir. I have nothing in particular on my mind, only I think . . . that one fellow here would be very suitable for my place, I mean as chauffeur to Colonel Porfirianu, so I came to ask you to release me."

"You have probably sent away all your cronies, and now you want to go away yourself, don't you?"

He said that it was 'nothing of the kind,' but it was true. Only Krolikowski, and two more colleagues from Warsaw were still left with him.

"And as for the other hundred and twenty, we did quite a good job of shipping them away, Colonel Porfirianu and I, didn't we, sir?"

He looked at me searchingly and scratched himself behind the ear. It was obvious that one way or another I shouldn't be able to keep him long, so I had to agree, I did, however, tell him that I would need a few days for the formalities connected with the change of chauffeurs.

Somehow I succeeded in arranging the whole thing, a couple of days later a new driver sat at the wheel of Colonel Porfirianu's Chevrolet, and Pryszczyk, much to my amazement, began to work enthusiastically, digging a draining ditch along the main street of the camp, though nobody asked him to do it.

I saw him at work the next day also and was even more puzzled, but had no time to enquire into it. I noticed that

Pryszczyk acted as foreman of the diggers. He had under him not only Krolikowski and the other two men from Warsaw, but also several others. He talked without interruption, criticised, corrected them and generally behaved like a great boss, making a lot of noise and fuss.

The next day I had a few things to talk over with Porfirianu. I sat in his office, the windows of which looked out on the gate and the central street of the camp along which the digging of the ditch was just being finished. The conversation with the colonel went smoothly enough. There still remained to be settled the question of some boards which we were to receive "immediately" as usual, and the delivery of which the Rumanian quartermaster postponed from day to day, promising that "myine diminata"—tomorrow morning—they would certainly be there. I had the impression that Porfirianu had sold these planks, in conspiracy with the quartermaster for he tried hard to change the subject. Nevertheless I wanted the planks badly and was thinking how to put on the pressure, when suddenly my eyes, looking for inspiration through the window, perceived the scene which was taking place below.

Pryszczyk and his three colleagues were "measuring" the street, using for the job a stick with a piece of string some twenty yards long, at the end of which the silver watch belonging to Krolikowski was dangling. The latter drove the stick into the middle of the street, another man stretched the string, a fourth lowered the end of the string with the dangling watch which acted as a weight and plummet. As for Pryszczyk, he first saw that the string was stretched parallel to the ditch, then stood behind Krolikowski and corrected the position of the stick and lastly ran to the third man, solemnly took the watch in his hand, looked at the time, shook his head, noted something in a copy book and told Krolikowski to drive the stick in again, some distance away.

Porfirianu turned the conversation to a party in the Rumanian officers' mess to which he invited me. I answered that I should be pleased to come and ceased to talk about the boards. I sat there nervously, looking stealthily through

the window and with pounding heart waited to see what would happen next. However, I had to go on talking to keep from arousing suspicions in Porfirianu, so I asked who would be at the party and what would be served for dinner—anything to make conversation.

Meanwhile a few officers and N C O's, sitting in the sun in front of the barracks of the Rumanian command of the camp, came near to the road, probably to look closer at the engineering endeavours of Pryszczyk who just then was reaching the gate guarded by the sentinel and corporal on duty. The corporal stood on the only dry spot in a fantastic sea of mud and staid at the clouds leaning against a transverse plank fixed to the gate, which was thickly reinforced with barbed wire.

I thought that Pryszczyk had not taken into consideration all these accidental items, that he had overestimated his possibilities, that soon a row would start, or that there was some trick in all this, hidden to me, which would begin to work in a moment. Maybe the barracks at the other end of the camp would catch fire. Or perhaps the lorry with foodstuffs would drive into a post and smash the gate. Some sudden alert would surely occupy the Rumanians' attention.

Nothing of the kind happened. There were no hidden tricks.

At the very moment Porfirianu began to describe how hot "stujka," a kind of vodka, ought to be prepared, Pryszczyk called aloud from under his measuring stick

"Hey! Corporal!" and an expressive gesture bade him to step aside.

The corporal hesitated for a moment, the mud was ankle deep.

He will be caught, I thought, there are the four of them against the whole guard, the officers are present. . . He has gone too far, this cannot succeed! The corporal will arrest him at any moment.

"Well, hurry, move along, old man," called Pryszczyk

resolutely, beginning some mysterious manoeuvres with the watch.

The corporal still hesitated, but suddenly one of the Rumanian officers shouted at him not to interrupt the Poles in their work. Pryszczyk saluted smartly and smiled at the officer. Then he measured the gate crosswise, asked the stupid corporal to help him, opened the gate and began to measure its length. He looked every now and then at the watch, then let it hang on its string, drove the stick into various places, scratched himself behind the ear with the end of his pencil, counted, wrote something, wrinkled his forehead and behaved generally like a surveyor. At last he shook his head contentedly and began to measure again, this time beyond the gate.

He returned once or twice inside the camp enclosure; he counted the posts of the fence, scolded Krolkowski, then one of the other men, pushed the onlookers aside and was so visibly engrossed in the importance of his task that everyone had to give way to him. He played his part excellently, with a true actor's temperament and the gusto of a Warsaw street-boy.

When at last, still fiddling with the stick, the string and the watch, he walked out of my sight, I was somehow full of misgivings and of curiosity.

What will happen next? They cannot allow them to walk into the town in this silly way! They will tell them to turn back, or ask what is the meaning of all this, or simply stop them.

I was prepared to hear shots at any moment, noise, shouts, a general row and I answered Porfirianu's questions ever less intelligently. At last he noticed my absentmindedness and seemed to be a little hurt. He looked out of the window and I too looked in the same direction, unable to conceal my embarrassment.

But there was nothing unusual to be seen through the window: the corporal was wiping his boots with some straw, putting one mud covered foot and then the other on the transverse plank in the gate, the sentry walked



slowly backward and forth on the other side of the barbed wire, with his rifle hung on his shoulder by a piece of string, the officers sat on a bench beside the ditch, smoking quietly.

I breathed more freely. I said something about a headache to explain my behaviour and thanked the colonel who wanted to give me a lift to town in his Chevrolet.

"I would prefer to walk, sir. The fresh air will do me good."

I left Porfirianu in a hurry, and nodding to the corporal who knew me well, I passed the gate. I saw the four "surveyors" some five hundred feet away, still measuring the road. I hurried toward them, Porfirianu was to pass them in a few moments in his car.

After one minute I realised that I would never be able to warn them. I heard Porfirianu's car just behind me.

I was furious. Why had I refused the colonel's offer? I could have retarded his departure, I could have talked to him longer or occupied his attention while we were passing the fugitives.

Maybe he will stop and ask me once more to drive with him, I thought.

But the Chevrolet passed me without stopping. Porfirianu looked the other way and did not see me at all. I stopped and looked to see what would happen.

The car speeded ahead. The claxon sounded. Pryszyk and his companion made way for it together with their measuring instruments. The driver slowed down. The four men in uniform stood to attention, saluting smartly. In the open window of the car I had a glimpse of a sleeve with a colonel's stripes. Porfirianu saluted nonchalantly and drove on!

But Pryszyk's adventures do not end here for on the next day when I arrived as usual at the camp, the first man who reported to see me was Pryszyk. He knocked on the door, entered the room and, furiously clicking his heels

together, stood before me with a gloomy and set expression

At first I thought that he had been caught on the way to Turnu-Severin, where he and his three companions were to be sent from Targu-Jiu after their safe arrival there. But Pryszczyk said "nothing of the kind"

"So what has happened? Where are the others—Bison, Krolikowski and the third man—what's his name?"

"They went off," he declared with bitterness. "They got Jewish passports, sir To prove that they are going to Palestine, as Jewish emigrants."

"And what about you?"

He pulled a terrible face, meant to be a smile of embarrassment.

"I brought back this stick and the string, sir, that the Rumanians should not suspect me . . ." he started, as usual, foolishly and from the wrong end.

"What stick? What on earth are you talking about?"

"The stick we measured the road with Just then three men were coming back with the guard, some of those who go to town for the mail-bag So I joined them, and the corporal did not recognise that we were not Bison and Krolikowski and the third man; quite the contrary, he answered our 'good day' very civilly, and so here I am back in the camp"

"But why didn't you go with your pals?" I asked "Have you changed your mind? Do you want to stay here? Don't you want to go to France any more?"

"Nothing of the kind, sir! Only this passport . . ."

"What passport?"

He produced a sheet folded into four, with a coquettish photograph of him taken in Bucharest, in a dinner jacket, a tie the width of a string and checked skung shirt. He handed it to me resignedly.

"How could I have gone with such a passport, sir" he asked with bitter irony

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I unfolded the document and read Isidore Buttock. Born on such and such a date at Lida, Religion Jewish. Profession Peddler, and so on.

Pryszczyk went on with sincere affliction: "For you see, sir, if I pretended to be the peddler Buttock, this would be the end of me. This is a dirty trick. Imagine! Buttock! Wouldn't the boys laugh at me! So what could I do? I took the passport and came back here again, to ask you not to allow them to treat me like this."

I felt sorry for him. I thought dispassionately that I would not care to travel under such a pseudonym myself.

"Well, what would you like to be named?" I asked him seriously.

Pryszczyk was pleased.

"Ignace Paderewski,<sup>1</sup> if I may, sir," he said without hesitation.

I had to explain to him patiently that although the Rumanians had difficulties in remembering Polish names, there must be a few who would be familiar with the name of Paderewski. He agreed at long last to Korzeniowski, on condition that his Christian name would be Ignace, and as far as profession was concerned, he might be a mechanic, and not necessarily a civil engineer.

"And what about escaping from here?" I enquired after settling these personal details and making a note in order to supply him with a passport the next day.

"There will be a way," he answered. "I will manage somehow. If you would only give me some civilian rags, there would be plenty of opportunities, sir."

An opportunity arose during the inspection of the camp performed by General Oprescu. This took place, as I have already mentioned, during a temporary deterioration in our relations with the Rumanians which brought with it a more severe supervision and a more ruthless enforcement of rules by the Rumanian military authorities.

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1. The famous Polish Composer and Statesman.

## HOW TO ESCAPE?

Such periods lasted for several weeks, passed and recurred. Just then, at the beginning of a new wave of hostility towards us, we were plagued with inspections of the internees and frequent roll calls. Severe punishments were administered to the Rumanian guards, N.C.O.'s and officers who did not guard the Poles conscientiously enough or could not resist bribes.

That day the General in person visited the barracks, shouted, gave vent to his displeasure, scolded the aide-de-camps, quarrelled with Colonel Porfirianu and vented his anger on the reddened and well-slapped faces of the sentinels.

At this moment Pryszczyk, clumsily, without wit or talent, tried to slip away in a civilian suit through the gate at which reinforced sentries were posted.

Of course he was caught and brought before the general. The latter looked at him with blazing eyes and asked what was the meaning of this.

"I, sir, am a 'refugiat'," Pryszczyk declared boldly. "A mechanic by profession. I am looking for work. I thought that maybe you, sir, could find something for me."

The general got even more angry. What cheek! There were enough unemployed in Rumania, and why should he give work to Polish vagabonds. To refugees!

"Throw him out of here!" he ordered. "Who let him in here, behind the barbed wire, without a pass? Men like him smuggle prohibited papers, spirits civilian clothes and passports! Have the camp commandant report to me at once! Jail the sentries."

The Rumanian N.C.O. began to explain something and got his face slapped at once. Porfirianu looked more closely at the Polish craftsman, recognised him, I think, in spite of his civilian clothes and was just opening his mouth to say something when the general turned on him with all the impetus of his fury.

"Porfirianu! This is your fault, too! You will be responsible for this! For such a state of affairs! For the

bribes! For everything!"

Porfirianu hesitated. Suddenly his eyes glittered shrewdly. He nudged me and blinked, pointing imperceptibly first to the general and then to Pryszczyk.

"Idiot," he said in a whisper. "Il s'enfuira, ce gamin."

"Throw this refugee out, I said!" shouted Oprescu. "At once!"

The order was complied with hurriedly. The "refugee" ran towards the town, and the general went on introducing order and discipline in the camp so as to make escapes impossible.



# SERGEANT PROT, NIGHT FIGHTER

*by J. W. Herbert*

BOULOGNE for the second time, Calais, again Boulogne, Brest, Ostend, a week of bad weather and—again Boulogne, and Brest and Le Havre . . . Genevieve takes off heavily in darkness, flies, finds her way across cloud, reflects rays of moonlight in the glass-panes of her turrets, wriggles away from the searchlights, evades the flak barrage, drops her bombs and returns.

One may get used to it. One can believe that this will always be so, though other crews have been wounded and killed, and sometimes failed to return.

"Sophie" lost her rear gunner over Brest; "Helen" brought two wounded back from Calais; "Cicely" did not return from Bremen. . . .

Only in her tenth flight with us did Genevieve have to make a forced landing. She landed without accident near the English coast, on one of the fighter aerodromes. There was something wrong with the oil feed pipes. We dropped our bombs into the sea instead of on the Ruhr, and Goral turned back cursing the engine mechanics, Talaga and British equipment. Zygmunt alone of the whole crew kept an Olympian calm, according to him, the responsibility for the mishap rested with a certain priest who on that day had turned up at the aerodrome, a priest, as everybody knows, bring bad luck, so something had to happen. And we should be grateful to be out of it so cheaply.

Finally, even Goral's anger passed when he succeeded in landing Genevieve smoothly and when, to the pleasant surprise of the whole crew, we heard in pitch darkness, a Polish voice demanding "Who the hell comes here at night?"

It appeared that we had landed on a Polish night fighter station and that it would be possible to repair the damage

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

to our machine within a few hours. Goral stayed in the machine, Zygmunt and the others went to the mess, and I met Sergeant Prot.

It was one of these unexpected meetings, which seem suddenly to turn back a great number of closely filled pages of one's life and take one straight into the past—not so very distant, but separated from the present, cut off by a number of events completely different from those that belonged to the past.

When I saw him in the hut, this turning back to the last years before the war was so sudden that for a long while I could not master my emotions. I shook Prot's hand without a word, trying to bring some order into my thoughts, to stop the memories and the pictures which were stirred. Somewhere outside me they rushed like wind, sweeping away with them my whole consciousness.

But at last I succeeded in connecting the past with the present. We began to talk in undertones, separated from the rest of the world—on so it seemed to me—by the immaterial wall of common feelings.

"News from Poland?" Prot repeated the last words of my question. "News from Poland, you mean from my people?"

I nodded and looked more carefully at his face, aged somewhat, the familiar scar across the chin, the distinct furrows running in an arc from his nostrils to the corner of his lips.

He wrinkled his brows and fell deep in thought, as if the question concerned distant and ancient matters which were first to be conjured up from memory before they could be discussed.

I was puzzled. I knew Sergeant Prot's wife and their two children in Deblin. She was a school teacher. His boy was then about three, and the girl—Sophie, if rightly remembered—yes, Sophie, after her mother—was four or five. This Sophie, Prot loved most. More than his wife and his son, more than can be expressed.

## SERGEANT PROT, NIGHT FIGHTER

Mrs. Prot sometimes came to see us, to ask my wife for advice about knitting. Unintelligible terms they spoke, purl knit, moss-stitch, cast off, shape. . . She was pretty, quiet and kind. Under her influence Prot, who as bachelor had been fond of lifting his elbow and making occasional rows, became a model NCO. The children were always clean and nicely dressed. I was fond of this family and especially valued Prot as one of the best instructors in the training centre where I myself was chief pilot.

And now it seemed to me that he had forgotten them.

He sat before me on a soldier's bed in the corner of the hut, facing the light of a bulb under a dusty tin shade, and looked with a frown towards four pilots who were playing bridge at a small, rickety table. He looked and probably did not see them at all, just as he did not notice the two other airmen stretched on the neighbouring beds. They, to be sure, did not take any notice of us. Their unbuttoned overalls hung on them in folds, and the yellow rubber Mae-Weats deformed their figures, indistinct in the semi-darkness of this hut where "Flight B" awaited the order to take off.

The two men on the beds looked at the low ceiling on which flies walked sleepily and spiders hung. The other four smoked and played intently, uttering every now and then the magic words of the bridge liturgy. And Port looked beyond them, far away, and did not answer my question, as if he were unable to visualise those about him I had asked him.

I did not speak. You can never tell what is hidden behind a silence of this sort. Despair? Forgetfulness and indifference? A tragedy of which you know nothing? Maybe simply an unwillingness to talk about these things with a man you used to know at a time when everything was different?

"What sort of news can I have, sir? he said suddenly in a low hoarse voice. "Do you remember, sir, that meadow in the park which we had to cross on our way to the river?" He took a deep breath as if he wanted to tell me everything at once.



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"I remember," I answered softly, and he held his breath and looked straight into my eyes, searchingly now, as if waiting for me to visualise that meadow.

But I remembered it perfectly. Is spread wide, was wet covered with tall grass which no one cared to move, and full of flowers. Lapwings and our aircraft flew over it, and children always went there in summer to pick flowers and make bouquets and wreaths. Farther on were the tilled fields of the farmers, and beyond them, between sandy banks and shallows, flowed the river, its banks overgrown with reeds. There we used to bathe.

"This was on September 3rd," Prot started again. "On September 3rd, a Sunday. Deblin was so heavily bombed by then that it no longer had any military value. Only a few houses were left intact. Among them the one where you, sir, used to live, next to our house. In the early morning we collected our men and organised our squadrons afresh, and about noon our families began to return from Masow, from Golab and from wherever they had taken shelter from the bombs. I went to fetch my family and wanted to look for a place for them to settle, because we were shortly to be removed from Deblin. I was just crossing this meadow, sir, when I saw all three of them in the distance. Sophie saw me too, and began to run toward me. And then a formation of Dorniers came along—some thirty of them—and began to fly over the field! We all stopped on the spot; no one knew what to do—it was so sudden. Between me and my family there was a distance of about 500 yards. Sophie was running towards me in a little red frock . . ."

He looked at me again, as if wanting to make sure that I was listening. I offered him my cigarette case, he took a cigarette and pressed it between his fingers.

"One of these bloody bastards saw her, for they were flying low, at less than a thousand feet. He dived on the meadow and began to fire with his front machine-guns. He was coming lower, just over Sophie, and I felt as if someone had scorched me. Out of breath, unable to cry, I could only look . . . I looked on, until she fell. How I have sur-

## SERGEANT PROT, NIGHT FIGHTER

vived it, I promise you, sir, I do not know. Even now it sometimes seem to me it is not true. . . .”

He looked again across the hut to somewhere very far, and I had the feeling that he was not really here although he was sitting in front of me and very slowly lifting his cigarette to his lips. He inhaled deeply and came back, he looked again into my eyes.

“I had to leave,” he said apologetically. Those were the orders. I hardly had time to bury her, the burial was without a priest.”

“And your wife?” I could not help asking. “And your son?” He spread his arms, turning his head to one side and shrugging,

“I don’t know,” he whispered so softly that if it were not for the movements of his lips, I would not have understood what he said.

We again smoked in silence. I did not know what to say, nor what to do. Besides—what could I say, or do?

I had not heard anything about him for a long time. I only here, in this night fighter squadron in Great Britain did learn that Prot was alive, and that he was one of our best pilots. He had shot down at night nine German machines, apart from the ones he shot down in daylight over France and in the autumn during the Battle of London.

I wanted to ask him about his night flights, but after these words of his, I had no courage to ask him anything.

After a while he began to speak again. First of all slowly with interruptions, as if it were difficult for him to turn back to that meadow on the River Wieprz, where a German pilot had killed his child—then more coherently and without those moments of absent-mindedness.

“I finished off quite a lot of them, sir. Not in Poland, for there was precious little to fly in. But in France, and here, last year. I did not spare myself and yet I am still alive. Maybe I will be able to return one day—to the grave in the cemetery at Deblin. . . . Then I was posted to a night fighter squadron. I had difficulties at the beginning and I

wanted to go back to flying in daylight, for I somehow could not hit any Germans. But one can learn everything, and now it is all right. I even prefer the night hunts, you can advance closer and attack the Hun from twenty yards."

He stopped, for at the table a quarrel flared up about a bridge move. He suddenly became animated, lit a new cigarette and, moving nearer to me, began in a completely different manner

"I remember my first encounter at night, after many failures. You know best, sir, how it feels when a man cannot understand how to do things in the air. Just like a young pilot who doesn't know yet how to land, or how to take off. It seems that he will never understand it, though you do your utmost to explain things to him. And suddenly an inspiration comes—once—and afterwards everything seems easy and simple."

I nodded, and he sat deeper in his chair and resting his elbows on his knees, smiled for the first time. He smiled not at me, but probably at his thoughts, as he used to smile in the old days when he wanted to tell me something he considered interesting. I remember that he used to smile like this when as a young instructor he confided in me his "discoveries" in methods of training and asked what I thought of them. I liked to listen to his confidences and to observe the ripening in him of the true talent of a pilot. And I think that he, too, was fond of me, for I had never tried to impress him, but tried to help him in thinking independently.

Now he smiled in the same way and I—as in the past—looked at him with encouragement and attention.

"We took off with Pilot-officer Rutecki; I don't think you have met him, sir, for he is a young pilot, of the 1939 class. He is the one playing bridge over there, with his back to us. So we took off late at night, or rather at two in the morning. There was no moon, but plenty of stars, and the air was clear. I hardly had time to draw in the undercarriage and to report by wireless to the station when they gave me the course and the attitude, four thousand feet. We began so climb. At six thousand, a new course,

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with a change of forty-five degrees. At ten thousand again, a change of ninety degrees. We reached fourteen thousand when they told us to turn by one hundred eighty degrees. All right. 'Keep to the level' We were flying and flying and nothing happened. After ten minutes I heard Rutecki reporting.

"Hallo, Cora, Cora—Red section, Flight B. We have the right course and altitude. Nothing in sight. What are we to do? Reception . . . reception .

"The answer came immediately

"Enemy aircraft in front of you, facing you."

"I have heard this phrase more than once, sir. And I felt the worse for it, just dying to see something—yet unable to see. I thought to myself that there, in the operation room, they know where I am and where 'they' are, maybe three hundred or two hundred yards from us, but I cannot see them. They are probably lower down outlined against the earth.

"I went down looking above me, head on, left, right—nothing. And the minutes are leaking away slowly, one after the other. Each of these minutes means more than six miles, and the Germans are not fixed to one spot either but may fly at an angle. Now they can be on my portside, now on my starboardside. Maybe they are just over their target? Perhaps they are dropping their bombs? Perhaps they are already escaping towards the Channel?"

"And if only I knew where the Channel was. . . There is no time to look at the compass, to find out. There is no time for communicating with my number 2, for just when I would be looking for him, I might brush past a German and not see him at all. . . . A sort of game of hide and seek!"

"But suddenly I saw them at once, they were flying in front of me, a little higher up. I did not exactly see their machines, only glimpses of new stars, showing from behind the wings. Only later did I notice a black shadow outlined against the navy blue sky and I also saw the stars disappear when it covered them.

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"I reported to 'operation' that I had sighted the enemy. Slowly, carefully, so as not to lose him in darkness, I climbed above him. I saw him all the time, ever more distinctly, though now he flew against the background of the earth, almost as black as the machine. *I had learned to see him.*

"The moon did not shine, but on the wings there was a pale glare from the sky, lighter than the night down below. I knew that from now on I would always be able to see them, from above and from below I knew it, but I did not think about it. Only one thought crossed my mind I have lost Rutecki somewhere, I am going to attack alone.

"Then I practically stopped thinking. The process which takes place in the brain before the fight and during the fight is, I think, only some mechanical work of a group of cells, destined exclusively to figure out the distances and the corrections of fire. The whole organism, all the muscular reflexes and all the senses are concentrated in that one direction so that there is no room for any other thoughts!

"I came nearer, 300 yards, 250, 200. . . . A lighter star reflected itself in the glass panes of their astro hatch. 150 yards. I could open fire. I could see distinctly the shape of the wings, of the fuselage, of the tail. This was a Do. 215. It swayed in the space before me lazily, gently, as if floating in some dark though transparent oil. It was growing, . . .

"100 yards. . . . I skidded flatly to the right, to have them aslant, for then the target is bigger. I reduced the engine speed to have them as long as possible in the range of my machine guns and my cannon.

"50 yards, Now! I could feel a light trembling of my machine and I saw the tracers in front of the wings of the Dorniers I pressed lightly on the controls. One second, two—she entered their range—three—it seemed as if tiny sparks, as from a tinder box, were jumping on the fuselage. I throttled down; I held the Dornier in my tracers, though it made an avoiding turn right, then left. Suddenly a red gleam, enormous, on the spot where the wing is joined to the fuselage—and ribbons of metal falling down!

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"I tried to follow him and dive, but what was actually falling was a heavy, hammered rag of metal and iron, it fell like a stone. So I only told them what I told every crew I had shot down, I told them that . . ."

He hesitated and suddenly fell silent. He looked at me as if awakening from sleep, turned to look at the players, at the other two men who seemed to be dozing stretched on the beds, and with a quick, rather nervous movement he pressed the end of his cigarette. His knitted brows trembled lightly. He turned his head aside and his face was dark in the shadow of his forehead. The white scar on his pointed chin grew red.

No one took any notice of him. No one heard what he was saying and the sudden silence hung between the two of us only like a pause before the last chord of a tune.

It was blatantly interrupted by the ringing of a telephone, loud, insolent, obtrusive. The operator on duty lifted the receiver. From the bridge-table four faces turned towards him. The men in folded overalls put their legs down on the floor. Somebody stifled a yawn.

The operator said: "Red and yellow section—to their machines."

Prot swelled his cheeks and sighed, as if in relief.

"I must go," he said to me cheerfully. "Will you stay here for a while, sir?"

"Yes. I will see you later. Good luck."

He shook my hand and held it for a moment in his hard, bony hand.

"I feel better now," he said "Thank you,"

I went into the operation room, three telephones were ringing alternately.

"Hallo, Cora, Cora. . . ."

Someone was reporting, someone asked for a fix, another one wanted the time, the Q. D. M., the weather. . . . Then expectantly "Reception . . . , reception . . . ."

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They were given courses, altitudes, orders. On the blackboard appeared little crosses and little dashes, marking the route of the aircraft, red, yellow and blue, green and white . . . On the large square table with a sector of the map traced on it little signs and coloured darts were moved by several telephone operators with headphones. Everything that was happening in the darkness of night, far away, over a large area of land and sea was reflected here as in a diagram, in the bright glare of lamps, under a large clock with a dial divided into coloured sectors.

The British Squadron Leader, a bony, tall, completely bald man looked through some papers and mumbled in turn "yes" or "all right" in answer to reports of his deputy who was constantly communicating with the officers at the three operational telephones. A Sergeant was marking positions on the map and making notes. Occasionally some, one came in, put some papers on the table, took others with him and went out again.

There was no room for feelings here. Fear, sacrifice, fury, hatred and heroism remained there, in the dark night, in the air. Here were only the dry, cold facts. They arose from blood, from nerves, from heart-throbs, but were expressed in numerical symbols and geometrical diagrams.

A young flight lieutenant with fair curly hair was on duty at the telephone to the left.

"Ada, Ada. Red section fight B. Reception . . . reception. . . ."

I came nearer, this was Prot's section. I heard his voice:

"Hallo, Cora, Cora. Here's red section, flight B. Reception . . ."

The curly-haired young man looked at the blackboard. Red crosses were mounting in an arc towards the white dashes, running from south to north.

"Hello, Ada, Ada. Enemy in front of you, fifteen degrees to the left. Course one, seventy. Reception . . . reception . . ."

The flight lieutenant put his left hand on the table. He was waiting and listening.

## SERGEANT PROT, NIGHT FIGHTER

Silence. Five seconds, ten seconds, fifteen seconds . . . .

The large hand of the clock moved in tiny jerks, trotting on the blue sector of the clock-dial and I, looking at it, saw Sergeant Prot's eyes, attentive, tense, piercing the darkness, looking for the reflection of starlight on the wings of a German machine. Now darkness became more dense in one spot, "a black shadow on the navy blue sky." A black shadow, which in fractions of seconds, "extinguishes, passes and then the light stars. . . . And one of these stars reflects itself in the "astro" turret!

"Hello, Cora, Cora, I've sighted the enemy . . .,"

The fight-lieutenant winked at me with a smile. We listened.

The clock went on measuring time at a trot; white sector—yellow sector. . . .

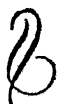
"Fifty yards . . . I open fire," reported Prot, as he might say "I open the book at Chapter Ten."

On the blackboard the red crosses climb over the white dashes. The hand of the clock reaches the red sector. It is at its centre, this means seven seconds, or almost a kilometre of flying, and some fifteen hundred fired shells. . . . Is Prot still alive?

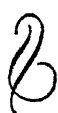
He is. I can hear his hoarse voice: "This is for Sophie's death! For my children and my wife. . . ."

The curly-headed fight-lieutenant is somewhat shocked; such words are not mentioned in the King's Regulations as the code of pilot-to-ground conversation.

"Number one, red section, flight B. Ada has shot down a German," he announces indifferently, and the row of white dashes disappears from the black-board.







# TORTURE



(By J KarSKI)

I WAS taken to a prison at the Slovakian military barracks in Preszov and cast into a dingy little cell containing nothing but a straw pallet and a slop bucket. I wiped the blood from my face and stretched out on the filthy pallet. The beating I had received, the blow of the gun butt, had stunned me.

Two men walked into my cell and yanked me brusquely to my feet. One of them deliberately spat on my bed as if to indicate his contempt, then ordered me to follow his companion.

The guard behind me bawled above the droning voices: 'Sit down, you dirty swine,' and pushed a huge fist into the small of my back.

So this was it, I thought—the Gestapo questioning about which I had heard so often. Up till then, the notion I had formed of Gestapo brutality was clear but vaguely unreal. It had never occurred to me that I could become an actual victim. But now it was here. I sat biting my lips in anxiety, clasping and unclasping my moist hands. My mind seemed blocked and powerless.

The thin man pushed some of the papers on the table towards me.

'Are these your papers?' he asked dryly.

I froze into inarticulateness. Any wrong answer, I felt would be like a tiny breach in a dike—one false response, and then perhaps a flood. The pale, blue eyes of the man glittered dangerously. His thin lips twisted in a humorless smile.

'You don't like talking to us? . . . We aren't good enough for you?'

The room exploded into violent guffaws. The guard

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who was at my back leaped on me and squeezed my neck in his grip.

'Answer the inspector, you swine,' he roared. His fingers dug into my neck like claws

'Yes, they are my papers,' I said. My voice seemed disassociated from my will, as if some one else were speaking through my vocal cords. The inspector bobbed his head up and down with elaborate sarcasm.

'Thank you. It is so good of you to acknowledge my question with a direct answer. As long as you are in that frame of my mind, my friend, you won't mind telling me the entire truth about your connection with the Underground?'

I answered promptly;

'I have no connections with the Underground. You can see by my papers. I am the son of a Lwow teacher.'

My papers were arranged in such a way that I was supposed to be the son of a teacher in Lwow, which was at this time under Russian occupation. The name was true, as were all details in the documents of the teacher's son, who, however, had previously escaped and was now abroad. So even if the Gestapo should try to establish my identity, they could not find out that I was not really the son.

The inspector leered at me sourly.

'I know, I know, isn't that clear from your papers? And or how long have you been the son of a Lwow teacher? Two months? . . . Three months?'

I knew I was poor at a rapid-fire cross-examination and dreaded the moment when I would have to improvise quickly.

'So, you are the son of a teacher at Lwow. That makes you intelligent man. We like to deal with intelligent men, don't we?'

His eyes roved about the room and, like trained dogs, the men smirked and nodded. He acknowledged his round of applause with the satisfied smile of an actor.

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'Tell me teacher's son,' he drawled, 'have you lived all your life in Lwows?'

'Yes.'

'It's a beautiful city, Lwow, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'Some day you would like to see it again, wouldn't you?'

I maintained a stolid silence, knowing that any response at all would simply make me appear ridiculous.

'You don't care to answer that question? the inspector asked softly. 'I'll never answer it for you. Yes, you would like to go back. Tell me, why did you leave Lwow?'

The last question was added with exaggerated gentleness. I had been coached in my identity thoroughly and I responded with mechanical alacrity.

'Because of the Soviets. My father didn't want me to stay in Lwow while it was occupied by the Russians.'

He made a sympathetic grimace

'Your father doesn't like the Russians, but you do?'

'I didn't say that. I do not like them either.'

'You like us better? His tone was quizzical, sarcastic.

'Well'—I tried to appear puzzled, ingenuous—'we trusted you more.'

'Trusted us more? You mean you don't any longer? How terrible!

'It's not that I don't trust the German people. . . . It's that I don't understand why I am not believed, I said, acting confused. I merely wanted to get Switzerland . . . to Geneva . . . to a friend in Geneva.'

He looked at me with mock credulity.

'You liked and trusted us,' he murmured ironically, but 'you wished to escape us? I am not a teacher's son. I don't understand you.'

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This man was a buffoon but not without a certain cleverness. He could twist my remarks adroitly. I made an effort to maintain a completely grave and ingenuous expression.

'I am a student,' I said simply. 'War interfered with my studies. I have had enough of all this war, I wanted to go to Switzerland to study.'

'And not by any chance did you want to go to France to join the Polish army?' he interrupted

'No. I wanted to go to Switzerland to live in peace until the end of the war. I did not want to fight you or anybody else. I wanted to study.'

'Yes, yes, go on,' he simpered. 'You intrigue me.'

Again roars of laughter. He held up his hand in the manner of an entertainer modestly acknowledging his applause but wishing to get on with the show.

'Tell me all,' he continued. 'Your trip must have been very interesting.'

'It wasn't interesting, exactly. My father and I discussed my leaving. Then, one day I crossed the Russian-German frontier and went to Warsaw. I wanted to escape the Russians at any price.'

'That was illegal, you know,' he said primly. 'You shouldn't do things like that.' Then waving his hand, he added, 'I am sorry to interrupt. Please go on.'

I continued the tale without much heart. It was beginning to sound too pat, too foolish. However, I realized that if I tried to take a new tack it would merely land me in confusion.

'In Warsaw I met by chance a former schoolmate of mine and asked him to help me to go to Geneva. His name is Mika. He lives in Warsaw at 30 Polna Street. He was somewhat mysterious and told me to meet him the next day in a cafe. When I met him he promised to help me get to Kosice in Hungary if I delivered to a friend of his a film

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showing the ruins of Warsaw I agreed and my friend gave me the film, forty-five dollars, and the address of a guide in a town near the frontier. That's all that happened until your men picked me up.'

I gave him a false address and false name in Kosice. But the name of my friend, Mika, in Warsaw, who was supposed to have helped me escape was a true one. His address was also true. But I knew that my revelations could do him no harm because he had escaped from Poland three months ago.

At the beginning of my recital the inspector had tilted his chair back, clasped his hands behind his head and closed his eyes as if he were about to hear an exceptionally sweet solo and wanted to enjoy it fully. When I had finished his eyes opened slowly and his lips spread slightly into a grin of sardonic appreciation.

He looked to the side of the room and gestured to a man with a pad on his knees.

'Did you get the touching story all down, Hans? I don't want a word changed. I want to read it exactly as it is.'

Then his eyes focused on my face and he murmured:

'Neat, very neat. Won't you excuse me if I don't listen to any more? Tomorrow someone else will have the pleasure of hearing it. Your conversation with him will surely be a much more pleasant one.'

Then he turned and with a surprising change of voice growled to the brute behind me:

'Get that lying bastard back to his cell.'

The guard again dug his fingers into my neck and yanked me up. Then he pushed me violently. As I stumbled forward another man pushed me ahead. The other men joined in, each adding his contribution toward keeping me in motion, as if I were a ball with which they were playing. As I reached the door the guard encircled my neck in

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his heavy hand and flung me, head foremost, out of the door. This little trick nearly broke my neck. Tears of rage and humiliation made my eyes smart, but I managed to look at him impassively, even a trifle disdainfully.

When I arrived at my cell I found that an ingenious device had been rigged up for my benefit. A huge reflector had been fitted to a powerful bulb. The light from it was magnified and diffused over the entire cell, so that there was no escape from the powerful glare.

As I flung myself on my straw pallet the rigid control I had exercised in the office deserted me. My legs were weak and hollow, my muscles trembling with the reactions I had suppressed. I tossed about, trying to shield my eyes from the blinding light that poured from the reflector. It was impossible to order my chaotic thoughts or devise a plan.

I had no illusions that my story had been found credible or that the mildness of my first examination would continue for long. My story had been too pat, too glib, and at the same time, too feeble, to warrant their belief. Yet I knew I would have to stick to it if only to guard against the danger of revealing any important information.

At dawn the guard who had escorted me on the previous day appeared in my cell, he jerked his thumb in the direction he wished me to take. I was blue with cold and sleeplessness. My teeth chattered and my knees nearly buckled as I walked.

We went to the room where the preliminary examination had taken place. Behind the larger table a padded swivel chair in shiny leather was occupied by a new official.

He was the type that one saw in Germany not too infrequently, but that was scarce in the Polish division of the Gestapo. He was an extraordinarily fat man, but his flesh seemed to have been smoothly molded from a single, uniformly rich substance. His fat curved rather than bulged. He had high, sharp cheekbones.

This large face, from which the black, glossy hair had been brushed severely back and pomaded, with its cruel,

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pursed lips, made an extraordinary impression of contrasts, of gross power mingling with feminine delicacy and cruelty. A strong odor of pomade and lotions exuded from his person. His hands were, for a person of his bulk, surprisingly slender, the fingers tapering into well manicured nails. He kept drumming on the table impatiently as he glanced around the room, his small eyes darting to and fro.

The other three were the usual, nondescript Gestapo guards—tall, well-muscled and neatly uniformed. My blood ran cold as I noted that two of them held rubber truncheons.

'Sit down at this table,' the officer began, 'and tell us the truth. We are not going to harm you if we are not forced to do so. You will sit down opposite me. All the time you must look directly in my eyes. You are not allowed to turn your head or to look away. You must answer all my questions at once. You are not allowed to reflect. I warn you—it will be very bad for you if your replies are contradictory or if you try to think back over your lies to make sure you are telling your story as you told it before.'

These words came mechanically, as though he had said them innumerable times before.

As I sat down, I tried desperately to repress any signs of fear. However, I could feel a muscle in my cheek twitch uncontrollably and I kept licking my dry lips. His eyes passed over me restlessly, examining me thoroughly. I was restive under his inspection and his deliberately prolonged silence.

'I am Inspector Pick,' he said portentously. 'If you haven't heard of me, you can draw some comfort for a short while. I never allow a man to walk or crawl out of here without getting the truth out of him. If I fail, there is usually not enough left of a prisoner to be recognized as a man. I assure you, after a few of our caresses, you will regard death as a luxury. I don't beg you to confess. I don't give a damn if you do or don't. If you are sensible and tell the truth you will be spared. If you don't, you will be beaten to within an inch of your life. I don't have the

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slightest respect for heroism. I am utterly unimpressed by the ability of some heroes to absorb an unusual amount of punishment. Now, I am going to begin your questioning. Remember, I don't want any hesitation. You get a fraction of a second to respond to a question. Each time you fail to answer promptly you will receive a painful reminder from the guards.'

This lengthy preamble seemed to exhaust him. Like a deflated balloon he collapsed back into the leather chair and rocked lightly back and forth.

'Do you know a man named Franek?' he purred indolently.

'Franek? . . . Franek?' No, I don't think so.' My voice was evasive and shaky.

'I thought you would say that. But we won't give you your reward for your first lie—just yet. Franek was a guide for the Underground. We landed him a few weeks ago and he told everything—the routes, the stopping points. We know pretty much about all of you passing this way. What are you doing and why all this travelling? Do not deny your work in the Underground. It is useless. We expect you to tell everything you know . . . Herr Courier. Do you understand?'

I licked my lips. My throat felt sore and parched. Apparently he either knew or had guessed a great deal. I stared stupidly at him, and in a hollow voice I protested weakly.

'I don't undeistand you. I am not a courier.'

He nodded to the men behind me and clasped his<sup>s</sup> hands on his stomach. This was the signal for one of the men to rap me sharply behind the ear with the rubber stick. A vivid, agonizing pain shot through my entire body as if a bolt of lightning had gone through me. Of all the beatings I have endured, I never felt anything to equal the instant of sheer pain produced by the impact of the rubber truncheon. It made every muscle in my body wince in sharp agony. It was something like the sensation produced when a den-



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tist's drill strikes a nerve, but infinitely multiplied and spread over the entire nervous system.

'I think we'll give him another chance,' he said with a short laugh. 'He doesn't look like the type that can stand much punishment. Will you talk now?'

'Where did you start your journey? Who gave you the papers and the film?'

'I told the other inspector,' I answered. 'I started from Warsaw. My friend, my schoolmate, gave me the film.'

'You insist on repeating this absurd story. You expect us to believe that the films showed only the ruins of Warsaw?'

'That's all it showed '

'Why did you throw it in the water if that was all it showed?'

I hesitated. My one source of strength lay in the fact that the film had been destroyed by the water. Except for the fake documents there was not a shred of material evidence against me.

'Answer me!' His voice, now high-pitched and exasperated, interrupted my reflections. 'Why did you throw it in the water?'

'I don't know,' I said in a timid voice. 'I thought I would protect my friend '

'You thought it would protect your friend,' he sneered. 'How? Did it have his name written on it?'

'No. It was instinct, I guess, that made me do it.'

'Instinct? You are in the habit of doing things by instinct? You hid your knapsack by instinct, too, I presume?'

'I did not have a knapsack,' I denied this charge indignantly with an air of injured innocence.

'You're a goddamned liar!' one of the guards shouted and then crashed his fist into my mouth. I felt a tooth crack and loosen. Blood oozed out from my lips. I ran

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my tongue over my lips and then placed it against the loose tooth. Bemusedly I sucked it back and forth, trying to detach it altogether.

Again the sharp pain rocketed through me without warning as the rubber truncheon landed behind my ear. I slid forward from the edge of the chair, pretending to faint and crumpling to the floor. Inspector Pick's voice seemed to drone far above me like the hum of a distant plane.

'That fainting act won't get you anywhere,' he was saying. 'Those swipes behind the ear have been worked out by our greatest medical authorities. They are painful, I know, but you cannot faint or lose consciousness from them. Theatrical scenes will not change scientific facts.'

These professorial remarks on the effects of the blows, for some reason, evoked a frenzied and sadistic delight in the guards. Above their laughter, the voice of the inspector, shrill, excited and disdainful, registered on my nerves.

'Get to work on him,' he shouted. 'Leave over just enough of him to be questioned.'

The guards pounced on me and propped me upright against the wall. A veritable barrage of fists thudded and crunched against my face and body. As I sagged, they supported me by holding me under the armpits. With the last remnant of my consciousness, I felt them release me and I collapsed on the floor in an insensible heap. They had overestimated my stamina and had not left over enough to be questioned.

They let me remain in my cell for three days without disturbing me. All my joints ached, my face was puffy and bruised and the side where I had been kicked was sensitive to the slightest touch. I felt the hopelessness of my situation. I realized that it was obvious to the Gestapo that I was lying. During every hearing there were more and more questions which I could not answer. But I was persuaded that the only thing that could save me was sticking to my story.

The aged Slovakian who brought me food and water

would encourage me to eat but I could barely manage to swallow the slop. The second morning he took me to the lavatory where I tried to wash the dried blood from my face. In the lavatory there were several Slovakian soldiers washing and shaving. Suddenly I noticed a used razor blade left on the window sill above the basin where I was washing. Almost automatically, without a clear purpose in my mind and without drawing attention to myself, I snatched it frantically and thrust it into my pocket. Walking to the cell and lying down, I clutched it feverishly. It was an excellent weapon. I hid it in the mattress, thinking it would be useful if the torturing would continue.

At the end of the third day the Gestapo guards entered my cell. I expected the usual torrent of abuse and a beating, but somehow I felt suddenly defiant, almost contemptuous of them. This note of challenge must have been communicated to one of the men.

He scrutinized me and spoke venomously:

'I think you would like another session with us. Maybe you want to show us how tough you are. Well, I hope you get a chance. But today we have to pretty you up for a visit to an S. S. officer. Don't you feel important?'

Deadened as all my faculties had become, I reacted sharply to this news. I was ready to encourage the feeblest hope in myself, the faintest prospect of life and freedom. I became even more cheerful when a barber entered to clean and shave me. While this was being done the guards took my clothes and shoes and brought them back brushed and cleaned.

Nothing dampened my optimism when I entered the office of the Schutz-Staffel man. He dismissed the guards curtly, even with a faint touch of loathing, then offered me a chair with patent graciousness and courtesy. As he walked over to dismiss a crippled soldier who was standing rigidly at attention at the other end of the room, I studied him eagerly, seeking a clue to the strategy I should employ.

I saw an extraordinarily handsome youth, not more than twenty-five, tall, slender, with long blond hair that fell

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with premeditated charm over his forehead. He had cultivated an attitude of cool, offhand masculinity. At other times, I would have been amused by the minute effort he made to fulfill each detail of his carefully worked-out pose. His uniform was a resplendent affair, meticulously tailored and garnished with ribbons and medals. His superiors had undoubtedly cast him as an archetypical specimen of youthful Prussian Junker and he strained to fulfill his obligations.

Something about him fascinated me. This was the genuine article, so authentic a product of Nazi education and Prussian tradition as to be vaguely unreal. Movement in him became incongruous, as if a sculpture of glorified Nazi youth had stepped off its pedestal.

I was utterly amazed when he came close to me, laid a gentle hand on my shoulder with a touch of youthful embarrassment and said with palpable solicitude:

'Don't be afraid of anything. I am going to see to it that no harm comes to you.'

The candid charm of this speech upset all my expectations and made me slightly clumsy. I stammered out something sounding like surprised thanks.

'Please don't thank me,' he replied. 'I can see that you are not the type of man we usually get here. You have culture and breeding. If you were born German, you would probably be very much like I am. In a way, it is a pleasure to meet someone like you in this Godforsaken hole of a Slovakian village where there are only fools and lice.'

My brain was working at top speed, trying to fathom the purpose of this new approach. None of my friends who had been caught up in the Gestapo dragnet had ever mentioned an interview even remotely resembling this one. I replied to his speech with extreme wariness, like a man stepping across a field full of holes in the dark.

'May I say,' I said cautiously, 'that you seem to be different from those I have encountered here?'

The response to my remark, which I awaited nervously, consisted only of a frank, direct stare, evincing neither ap-

proval nor disapproval. He inclined his head to me and said quietly

'Will you please come to my room with me?'

The room which he conducted me was furnished in old-fashioned Germanic style. The walls had been decorated with huge enlargements of photographs of Baldur von Schirach, the leader of the Nazi youth movement and Heinrich Himmler, the Gestapo chief. On the wall above his desk was suspended an old Germanic sword. I averted my gaze from these portraits to a third picture of an aristocratic, middle-aged lady with a young girl whose features and blond hair clearly resembled those of the man before me.

'They are my mother and sister,' he vouchsafed. 'My father died five years ago.'

There was a moment of constrained silence. With an air of abrupt determination, assumed, I felt, to cover his confusion, he pointed dramatically at the picture of Schirach.

'Look at him,' he said bitterly, a hurt expression on his face. 'A wonderful looking man. Isn't that so? Once I worshipped him. I thought I was his favourite . . '

He talked to me in a confidential manner that was inexplicable to me. I knew that recipients of similar confidences often suffered for the privilege of listening to them.

He had been raised in a typical Prussian household. A delicate and sensitive child, he had developed an intense hatred for his stern, tyrannical father who had been contemptuous of his frailty. His mother and sister adored him. When he was seventeen, he was sent to an 'Ordensburg,' one of the famous Nazi colleges, in which the elite of the new order were trained. At that time, before Hitler's rise to power, this Ordensburg had been operated secretly.

His eyes blazed fanatically as he told me about the Ordensburg, and his voice became hoarse with emotion as he relived the events of those years. When he was a student in this Germanic 'monastery,' he met Baldur von Schirach, who selected him for his favorite, visited him fre-

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quently, and took him for long, intimate walks in the surrounding forests. In his third year at the college, he had been superseded in Schirach's favor by a boy who, as Schirach had told him, sang old Germanic songs more beautifully than he and was, besides, the best discus thrower in the school.

Recounting this incident seemed to reopen an old wound, the pain it gave him causing him involuntarily to shade his eyes as if a powerful light were being flashed into them. The recital came to a sudden end.

'I became an S S officer,' he said, returning to the job at hand, 'and I am proud of the work I am doing. I wanted to see you because you impressed us. I am sure we will come to an understanding. I beg you to believe that I am not going to do anything to harm you personally, nor shall I ask you to betray anybody or to become our agent. The matter I want to talk over with you is of vital importance for the future of Poland.'

At last the purpose of this unusual interview became clear. I was to be converted to the new order by this offspring of purest Nazi breeding. I said nothing, trying desperately to work out an inoffensive response to this implied invitation. Although a great deal of his candor and charm had been provided for the purpose of luring me into the fold, I felt sure that this display was not entirely an act contrived solely for my benefit. It had too genuine and passionate a ring.

For an instant I hoped that when his efforts proved fruitless and I failed to succumb to the alluring offers, he might still like or respect me sufficiently to intervene on my behalf. It did not take much reflection to clear my head of this delusion. Apart from the plain psychological fact that he would turn on me all the more venomously because I had been the recipient of his confidences, I realized that he had been thoroughly indoctrinated with the Nazi principles of power and cruelty.

He continued in his former vein of reminiscence, at once candid and boastful.

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'You know,' he said, 'the National Socialist Party, at its inception, was based on purely masculine ideals. I like to talk frankly, man to man, and I'm sure we'll get on together.'

He strolled to a chest in the corner of the room, brought out a decanter of brandy and offered me a drink and cigarettes. In a fresh access of geniality he gave me a drink, lit my cigarette, and pulled his chair closer to me.

'Well, let's get down to business,' he said smilingly. 'First, I ought to tell you—I had your status changed to that of a military prisoner and have instructions that you be treated accordingly.'

'Thank you,' I replied.

'Not at all. You aren't, after all, a criminal, and I am positive that after you hear me out you will wish to work with us and not against us.'

I ventured a mild protest.

'I have never worked against you, as you put it. Surely you will believe me when I say that I have nothing to do with the Underground. . . '

He interrupted me and looked a bit grimmer.

'Please don't bother going through that rigamarole. We have conclusive evidence, which I shall soon show you, that you are a courier for the Underground.'

He looked at me, waiting to see if I would continue in my denials. As I maintained silence, he patted me on the knee.

'That's better, old man. Don't make a fool of yourself by denying the obvious.'

Then shaking his head in genuine bewilderment, he continued

I can't for the life of me understand the stubbornness of you Poles at the present time. You haven't the glimmering of hope for victory. France has fallen, England is bidding for a negotiated peace, America is thousands of miles away.'

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His eyes clouded with a faraway look as he sipped his brandy. Then he rhapsodized

'Very soon the Fuehrer will dictate peace in London. In a few years, he will proclaim the New Order on the steps of the White House in Washington. The new peace will be permanent, not like the lying, hypocritical promises of the Judeo-democratic plutocracies. Pax Germanica, the peace Nietzsche and all the great thinkers and poets who have worked for the New Order dreamed of. I know all the world fears us. They are wrong. We do not want to harm anybody.' Then suddenly changing his tone he continued. 'With the exception of the Jews, of course. They will be exterminated. This is the Fuehrer's will. For the non-German world we want to do justice and we will do justice. For work, bread and life. For loyalty to the Third Reich, we will permit participation in our new civilization. As you see, our conditions are generous.'

The brandy, the heat of the room, the intense, emotional speech of the lieutenant had fatigued me. I felt drowsy and slightly drunk. I cut into his speech rather rudely.

'I've heard most of that before,' I said. 'What do you want of me?'

If my tone was insolent, he didn't detect it, so wrapped up was he in his glowing visions of the future.

'We wish to be fair to you,' he said. 'We know who and what you are. You are carrying information from the Underground to your leaders in France. But I am not going to ask you to betray your nation, your leaders or your friends. We do not want to punish them, we want to collaborate with them. We want to be able to contact them to persuade them of the benefits of a thoroughgoing Polish-German collaboration. We will guarantee their safety, on our German word of honour. You yourself shall be the intermediary in making such contacts. If you love your country, you will not reject this proposition. It is your duty to give your leaders an opportunity to discuss the present situation with us. Look at the other occupied countries



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In each of them there are men of realistic understanding who have entered into collaboration to the great advantage of themselves and their country. You Poles are strange exception—unhappily for yourselves. What I am proposing to you is not dishonorable or unworthy’

He looked at me encouragingly, and added solemnly  
‘Do you accept my proposal?’

I replied softly, surprised at my own firmness.

‘I cannot accept. For two reasons. I don’t believe that the results of force can achieve anything but evil. Collaboration can be based only on mutual respect, freedom, and understanding. Besides, even if I found your principles acceptable, there is nothing I could do. You have over-estimated my importance. I know nothing of the Underground or its leaders.’

He looked at me with such fanatical savagery and contempt that I felt I had been utterly foolhardy in my response. I could have wavered, temporized with his offers, but the atmosphere of frankness and subtlety influenced me with artless boldness.

‘You persist in that stupid comedy!’ The lieutenant’s voice became controlled, each word was measured and struck home like the lash of a whip. He rang a buzzer alongside his chair.

‘Heinrich, bring me the film and send the Gestapo guards in.’

As the soldier hobbled out the lieutenant walked about the room, muttering to himself and flashing looks of hatred at me that had an actual personal quality. I could see that he despised me, not solely as an intransigent enemy of his country, but as one who showed himself unworthy of collaboration and deceived him.

The soldier came into the room, followed by the two Gestapo men. He handed some prints to the lieutenant, who in turn handed them over to me.

‘These are enlarged prints of the films you threw into

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the water. We saved a small portion of them—a small but important portion. Look at them.'

I took the films with trembling hands. For a moment I thought I would go mad with rage and impotence. I recognized the prints as the last three pieces of my Leica film. I understood. The water had not soaked through the entire roll. I looked at the prints. Nothing had been set in code except for the names and places. Everything had been plainly written out, but fortunately, the three pieces they were able to save contained nothing important or dangerous. I must have failed to control my emotions. The man who had given the films to me had had no time or was too careless to put the text into ciphers. My dominant reaction was not fear but rage that I could not denounce him for his carelessness. The officer regarded me searchingly.

'Do you recognize this text?' he asked. 'I am still frank with you. Thirty-five pieces were destroyed. The gendarmes who allowed you to throw this film in the water were sent to the front—I hope they will behave better there than in our services. Now I expect you to tell me what was in the rest of the film.'

I answered in a choked, desperate voice. 'No, I can't. There must be some mistake . . . I must have been misled.'

He became livid with rage.

'You'll never stop that idiotic drive! about your innocence, will you?'

He walked to the corner of the room, reached into the chest from which he had not long before taken the brandy, and extracted a riding whip.

'A short time ago,' he shouted furiously, 'I spoke to you man to man, as a Pole whom I could respect. Now you are nothing but a dirty, whining coward, a hypocrite and a fool.'

He slashed the whip across my cheek. The Gestapo men flung themselves on me and drove their fists into me. The world crumbled about me as I received their orgasmic blows. . . .

## POLISH SHORT STORIES

In my cell, it was without any sense of triumph that I realized I had again survived a Gestapo beating. Lying on the pallet, everything that my body touched contributed to the throbbing pain that spread from head to foot. Running my tongue across my bleeding gums, I felt, without any emotion, that four of my teeth had been knocked out. My face felt inhuman, an ugly, bloody, distorted mask. I realized that another beating would probably kill me and I burned with humiliation and rage.

I knew that I had arrived at the end. That I should never be free again, that I should not survive another beating and that in order to escape the degradation of betraying my friends while I was half-conscious, the only thing for me to do was to use the razor blade and to take my own life.

I had often wondered what people had in mind when they died for an ideal. I was certain that they were absorbed by great, soaring thoughts about the cause for which they were about to die. I was frankly surprised when I discovered it was not so. I felt only overwhelming disgust which surpassed even my physical pain.

And I thought of my mother. My childhood, my career, my hopes. I felt a bottomless sorrow that I had to die a wretched, inglorious death, like a crushed insect, miserable and anonymous. Neither my family nor my friends would ever learn what had happened to me and where my body would lie. I had assumed so many aliases that even if the Nazis wished to inform anyone of my death they probably could not track down my real identity.

I lay down on the pallet, awaiting the hour when the Slovak would complete his rounds. Till then my purpose seemed to have formed itself. I had hardly reasoned or reflected, merely acted on the promptings of pain and the desire to escape to die. I thought of my religious convictions and the undeniable guilt which would be mine. But the memory of the last beating was too vivid. One phrase dominated my mind. I am disgusted, I am disgusted.

The guard has finished his rounds. I took out the razor and cut into my right wrist. The pain was not great. Obviously, I had not hurt the vein. I tried again, this time

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lower, this time cutting back and forth as hard as I could. Suddenly the blood streamed like a fountain. I knew I had got it this time. Then, clutching the razor in my bleeding right hand, I cut the vein on the left wrist. This time it was easier. I lay on my bed with my arms outstretched at my sides. The blood spurted out evenly, forming pools beside my legs. In a few minutes I felt I was getting weaker. In a haze I realized that the blood had stopped flowing and that I was still alive. In fear of being unsuccessful, I flung my arms about to make them bleed again. The blood flowed in thick streams. I felt as though I were suffocating and tried to draw breath through my mouth. I became nauseous, retched, and vomited. Then I lost consciousness.

\* \* \*

I have no idea how long I remained unconscious. I returned to my senses only gradually. Blurred impressions began to seep through the dull pain that blanketed me shutting off the world. At first my consciousness could register only a few painful, physical facts. The inside of my mouth and my tongue were cracked and inflamed and exuded a bitter taste. A monotonous, inescapable ringing troubled my ears. Feebly, I tried to determine the nature of my surroundings, but something held back my effort. My will was impeded by an agency that acted to seal off all new sensations and return me to the oblivion from which I struggled to emerge.

Against this unrelenting pressure, this ceaseless urge to let go and fall back into darkness, I forced myself into awareness bit by bit. One thing became clear. I was not in my cell. I was lying on a hard wooden slab and not on the filthy pallet of straw.

My body was rigid, cramped. I tried to twist over on my side. I encountered resistance of some kind. Again I wrenched, with greater violence. I still could not move. My muscles contracted in a sudden panic. I felt sure that I was paralyzed, that some injury to my nerves had affected me so that my body could no longer execute the commands of my brain. Frenzied now, I lashed my body about until

I felt something cutting into my flesh in several places. It dawned on me that I was securely tied to a wooden slab. Inappropriately, a grim bit of humour entered my mind. My Nazi captors, it occurred to me, must have credited me with the prowess of one of their own fabled supermen.

This thought was astringent, rejuvenating my will to perceive. I forced my eyes slowly to open and focus on the objects about me. A powerful glare beat down on my eyeballs, making them water and blink. Suspended from the ceiling by a wire, a lamp dangled. It had been shaded in such a way as to concentrate its beams on me, as if I had been spotlighted on a stage.

A face loomed above me, magnified out of all proportion. Then, above a ringing sensation in my ears, I heard a voice speaking Slovakian.

'Don't be frightened. You are in Slovakian hospital. We are going to make you well. In a moment you will receive a blood transfusion.'

His words registered like an icy shock and I managed to speak.

'I don't want a transfusion. Let me die. I know you don't understand, but please let me die.'

'Be quiet. Everything will be all right.'

I remember praying that I would not come back to life. Death was the consummation of all my desire. I wanted no more of the struggle. All I wanted was the blackness where physical pain did not matter.

The doctor, for I was now able to see that he was garbed in the conventional white gown, moved away, and beyond the spot where he had stood I saw the broad, menacing back of a gendarme. The doctor moved back into my line of vision. A sharp instrument jabbed into my leg. I tried to pull away.

'This will do you good,' the doctor said.

I tried to stop them, tear away from their hands and, twisting in a last burst of resistance, I fainted.

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When I awoke, I found myself in a small, narrow room with three other patients, all Slovakian. There was a sharp, unpleasant odor of carbolic acid and iodoform. It was late at night, a bright moon illuminating the beds and their occupants.

I sat upon my bed, surprised at the absence of pain. Apart from the slight pressure in my temples, my body was steeped in a luxurious torpor. With difficulty, I roused myself to the contemplation of the possibility of another attempt at suicide or of escaping. I glanced about the room. Through the half-open door I noticed the omnipresent uniform. Exhausted and discouraged, I let my head fall back on the pillow.

In a rambling, disconnected fashion, I began to speculate on my prospects. There was little hope for me. Even if a chance of escape should present itself, I doubted whether I could muster sufficient strength to take advantage of the opportunity. Soon, it occurred to me, I would probably be facing the Gestapo torturers again. I resolved to make another attempt at suicide. With whatever shred of comfort I could draw from this decision, I fell asleep.

Next morning a cheerful feminine voice awoke me. A nun was standing at my bedside, holding a thermometer. She placed it in my mouth and whispered:

'You understand Slovakian?'

The thermometer between my lips, I mumbled an affirmative. Slovakian is very much like Polish and I understand almost every word.

'Listen carefully,' she said. 'It is better to be here than in prison. We will try to keep you here as long as possible. Do you understand?'

I understood the words but could not quite fathom the purpose behind them.

In the next week I made considerable progress towards regaining my health. My general physical condition was much improved, although I could not yet do anything with

my hands, even feed myself. Splints held my wrists rigid and the yards and yards of white bandages gave the appearance of white boxing gloves. I remembered the sister's words, however, and pretended a weakness I felt less and less each day.

The days I spent in that Slovakian hospital in Preszow were perhaps the strangest of my life. My convalescence inspired mingled emotions in me. A keen exultation and a nearly rapturous sense of returning strength alternated with fits of despondency at the recurring dread of another questioning by the Gestapo. It became increasingly irksome to feign helplessness. I longed to get out of bed, move about, walk and sit outdoors in the sunshine. It was difficult to repress these normal desires and I was impatient with the constraint of doing so.

On the fifth day, lying inertly in bed became intolerable. When the sister who had held the thermometer in my mouth the first day appeared, I implored her to bring me a newspaper. She glanced warningly at me but finally consented. I looked at the paper with avid expectancy. The headline, in huge black letters, exploded inside my brain like a bomb. '*France Surrenders!*' it read.

I read it over and over, as if repetition might change what I thought was a lie of the S. S. Lieutenant. The report was brief. Marshal Petain had signed an armistice in the Forest of Compiègne. French resistance had completely crumbled. The aged marshal had called on his countrymen for absolute obedience. Collaboration . . . Germany had mastered Western Europe.

It took me a few minutes to read and grasp the facts. And then I knew real despair. For hundreds of years we have been bound by historical and cultural ties that made France, to us Poles, more than a country. France was almost another motherland to us, and we loved her with the same deep, unreasoning love with which we loved Poland. Moreover, we had based the hope for Poland's freedom on a French victory. Now I could see no hope.

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Then I realized—the article contained no information on the fate of Great Britain. I searched the pages feverishly until I came to the word, 'England.' I read further. '*England Commits Suicide . . .*' Then this really was the end. I finally managed to read the entire line. The whole world changed; I wanted to rise up so that I could kneel to pray because it said '*England Commits Suicide by Continuing to Resist.*' I prayed the way all free people were praying those days, I suppose, but with a passion known only by those who have been defeated. I prayed for the steadfast and stubborn resistance for Britain's fighting men, that they would never admit defeat, and I prayed for courage for all those who did not rest in this struggle.

I knew England. I had been there in 1937 and 1938. There were things I disliked in their national character—they were stiff and dry, many did not understand continental Europe and did not care to. But they were also stubborn, strong, realistic. A Frenchman, or a Pole, with an exaggerated love for the grand gesture might commit suicide for a lost cause. An Englishman, never. Even Dunkirk, shocking as the news was, could not shake my conviction. I knew that this nation business men, organizers, colonizers, and statesmen had the ability to evaluate their own strength, that they knew where and how to utilize their potentialities. They do not gamble recklessly with a worthless hand. If they still resist. I told myself, it is because they have calculated and seen a chance of winning. I was not interested in their idealism; Perhaps I was not just to England, but it was on British common sense alone that I pinned all my hopes.

Despite the heartening evidence of the sympathetic attitude of those about me, the future appeared as black as ever. I realized that with all their good will, I could hardly expect these Slovaks to take any risk in helping me to escape. I could see endless days spent in feigning sickness, in temperature readings, in whispered consolations of doctors and nurses. . . .

The routine I had envisaged proved as chafing as I had anticipated until the eleventh day after my re-entrance to this hospital.



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On that day, as I was lying somnolently in bed, staring at the listless and obviously bored Nazi guard, a young girl, who was an absolute stranger to me, diffidently entered my room. She was a rather plain girl with blunt, good-natured features, dressed in surprisingly smart street clothes. In her hand she held a bunch of roses. I was taken back when she spoke to me in German.

‘Do you understand German?’ she inquired softly.

My reply was sharp and rather hostile.

‘Yes. What do you want?’

I could see the Gestapo man begin to stir in his chair and eye her with curiosity, but I could not feel any threat of danger in the situation. I had assumed that this girl had blundered into the wrong room. I was about to stop her, ask her whether she was mistaking me for somebody else, but she spoke hurriedly, shyly

‘I am a German. I have just had an appendicitis operation. All the patients in the hospital have heard about you and sympathize with you. I would like you to have these roses, so that you will not think all Germans are as bad as those you encountered in the war.’

I was aghast. Apparently she had no idea that the man in civilian clothes sitting near my bed was a Gestapo agent. I collected my wits sufficiently to blurt out:

‘But I never saw you before . . . I don’t know you, never spoke to you. Why do you bother me?’

She looked hurt, puzzled.

‘Please don’t be so bitter. Learn to forgive. You will be happier.’ She put the flowers on the bed and turned to leave. The eyes of the Gestapo man followed her like a cat’s.

‘Thank you,’ I almost shrieked in desperation, ‘but I don’t know you. I never saw you . . .’

The Gestapo agent rose indolently from his chair, strolled across the room and barred the door with his outstretched arms.

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'That was a lovely speech,' he said. He seized her arm, turned her around and forced her back to the bed. When she heard him speak in German, she turned pale and began to tremble. I pitied her immensely. I tried to expostulate with the guard.

'She didn't mean any harm. I tell you, I don't know her. You ought to let her go. She is frightened to death—can't you see?'

He looked at me coldly. 'Save your breath. You'll need it later.'

He picked up bunch of roses and tore them to shreds searching for a hidden message. Then he locked his fingers around the girl's arm and propelled her brutally out of the room.

Then, almost as if it had slipped out, without purpose or design, he sighed and observed:

'I should think that people with a little experience in politics could devise more ingenious stratagems than the use of a little girl carrying roses'

He paused for a reply which was not forthcoming.

"You will be removed from this hospital in two hours.' He calmly watched this remark register on me. I tried to keep my face blank and expressionless. 'Of course,' he said 'we realize that moving you is very dangerous, possibly fatal. We are not quite the monsters we are made out to be. But what choice do you leave us? Your colleagues obviously know exactly where you are. . . .'

'The girl is completely innocent. She is much too naive to be mixed up. . . .'

He interrupted me impatiently.

'Oh, come now, if that's your attitude you'd better get ready to leave.'

The rest of my speech died on my lips.

Again I was ordered into my clothes and conducted to a car. I had no notion of my destination, and I was too

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miserable even to speculate about it. The Gestapo men took up their positions on either side of me. I sat, sunk in apathy. We rode along in the gathering twilight of the Slovakian mountains. The air was sharp and a trifle chilly. Village after village passed by but I took little notice of them. Only one thought stirred in my mind . . . suicide, an opportunity to leap from the car.

It was just before darkness that a spark of interest quickened in me. I realized with an accelerated beat of my heart that I was gazing at a familiar landmark—a small white house with dark blue shutters. We were over the border, in the south of Poland. In the past, I had spent a happy summer vacation in this very house. We were out of the town of Krynica before my eyes could drink in its features and within an hour we had reached a small town where I had frequently done some work.

It was all I could do to control my excitement and exultation. It was from this very place that I had been sent abroad twice by the Underground. I had an extensive acquaintance here—my liaison agent, my guides lived in this town. Could this be our destination? I dared not even allow myself to wish it. It would be too fortunate, too unreal. We halted in front of the hospital.

Again a repetition of my entrance into the Preszow hospital. The guards flanking me, I tottered up the stairs. I was genuinely sick and weak but I exaggerated my condition. My bandages were soaked in blood which made my acting more impressive. My guards were obliged to carry me to the second floor where they dumped me unceremoniously on a bed.

What were the Nazis up to, I wondered. Was this a new piece of psychology on the part of the 'master race'? Perhaps, I reflected, they wanted to make me feel overconfident and betray myself. Then it occurred to me that I might have been taken to this town especially to lure my friends and colleagues into the open. But it did not seem possible that they could know connections with this place. My mind gnawed anxiously at this problem, but I could reach no definite conclusion.

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I closed my eyes and writhed feebly on the bed. Alongside my bed, a man and a woman were conversing in Polish and I judged them to be a doctor and a nurse. The guard must have been hovering near-by for the doctor addressed him curtly.

'Isn't it your duty to guard the room from the corridor? You won't do any good by crowding me.'

The guard did not answer and walked away heavily, his footsteps resounding like a cannonade in the oppressive silence.

The doctor bent over me to examine and dress my wounds. As he unwound the clotted and filthy bandages he fired questions at me in a rapid, anxious whisper.

'Where did they arrest you? . . . May I help you? . . . Shall I let someone know about you?'

The circumstances were not such as to arouse my trust easily. I suspected a trick and answered in aggrieved and injured tones.

'I have no one to send messages to. I am innocent of all these charges. All I wanted to do was to go to Switzerland. Why won't you believe me?'

'Don't be afraid,' he whispered. 'I am not a provocateur. The entire staff—doctors, nurses and attendants—is all Polish and there is not a single traitor or renegade among us.'

I opened my eyes and stared intently at him. He was extremely young for a doctor and looked as if he were playing a role. He had the face of a farm boy, light-skinned, freckled, and topped by a thatch of tousled blond hair. The guileless countenance made me feel like opening my heart in a burst of confidence, but the prudence and caution that had become second nature by this time checked my impulse. I said nothing.

The following morning, a sister (as in Preszow, all the nurses were nuns from a near-by convent) entered my ward, nodded at me, and without a word, inserted a

thermometer between my lips. She watched me impassively almost woodenly, then removed the thermometer and read it. I gazed anxiously at the mercury. It stopped at 100°. She took the chart in her hand, gravely entered a figure of 103°, and then left the ward. She returned quickly with an elderly man who introduced himself as the head physician. He raised his voice and addressed me harshly.

'Look here, young man,' he snapped. 'You are very sick but you can be cured if you co-operate with us. We can only give you proper medical treatment. If you want to live you must rest and avoid anxiety. If you don't follow my advice—' he shrugged callously, '—we can always use this bed for our townsfolk. Now lie quietly and let me examine you.'

He turned to the nurse and ordered her to remove a tray and bring some ointments and bandages. As she left the room, she stumbled against the guard, scattering the contents of the tray on the floor. He hastened to help her pick them up. While they were engaged in groping about on the floor, the doctor whispered to me.

'Courage... As soon as I leave, begin moaning and whining. Shout that you are going to die and that you wish to go to confession.'

When the nurse returned, he issued crisp, peremptory instructions to her.

'Change his dressings every two hours and see that he doesn't get out of bed. If I am needed, call me. I'll be in my office.'

As he turned on his heel, he braked to me. 'As for you, if you want to live, follow instructions.'

After the nurse changed my bandages, I began to twist about wildly, gradually working up to a series of frenzied, convulsive movements accompanied by loud moans.

I wailed loudly, 'I am going to die—to die, do you hear? . . . I want to be confessed . . . Please; sister, please speak to the doctor. You are a good Catholic . . . Don't let me die a sinner. . . '

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She returned with the head physician, who eyed me with annoyance and distaste. He spoke with loud exasperation.

'Can't you be a man? If you have determined to die, there is nothing we can do about it. Bring him a wheel-chair, please sister'

I continued to moan and whine. The doctor shouted at me

'Enough of your moans! You are getting your way. You are going to be confessed'

A wheel-chair was brought in. The nurse tucked me into a bathrobe and helped me into it. She wheeled me out of the room, the Nazi guard marching behind us if he were on military parade.

I made my confession to an old, kindly priest, who displayed great sympathy and concern for me. At the conclusion of my confession, he placed his hands on my shoulders and said consolation.

'Do not be afraid, boy. Maintain your faith in God. We are all aware of your suffering for our beloved Poland. Everyone in this hospital is anxious to help you.'

My confession left me with a feeling of tranquility and peace. It did not endure very long for, during the next few days, I had to concentrate on the task of making myself appear deathly ill. My body responded to this need. Modern psychiatrists have insisted that the physical and psychical life of an individual are closely linked. My own experiences have persuaded me of the truth of this belief. After a few days of intensive effort, I actually became a very sick man. I was unable to eat, to lift my arms, to dress unaided, or to walk to the lavatory. Despite the administration of sedatives, I had a perpetual headache. Chills and feverish spells alternated and my temperature was always abnormal.

Consequently I had been granted a concession by the hospital authorities. I was permitted to be brought into the

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chapel daily. One day while I was praying in the chapel, the sister who brought me in the wheel-chair knelt-down beside me. I studied her face with its courageous, determined lines and decided to risk everything. I knew that I could not speak to her while there were other people in the chapel, so I asked if she would mind waiting for me to finish praying. She said she would wait. The coolness and quiet of the chapel, her calm firmness gave me reassurance. I felt certain I could trust her. Finally we were alone. I leaned over to whisper to her

'Sister, I know you are a good woman. But it is important for me to know if you are a good Pole. . . .'

She looked me full in the face for a moment and, continuing to tell her rosary, said simply:

'I love Poland.'

But it was not necessary for her to tell me. I had seen her eyes. I spoke rapidly, in a low voice:

'I want to ask you to do something. But before I tell you what it is, I must tell you that it may be dangerous for you. You are free to refuse, of course.

'Tell me what you want. If I can do it, I will.'

'Thank you,' I said fervently. 'I knew you would say that. Here is what I would like you to do. There is a family in this town by the name of—. They have a daughter, Stefi. Find her and tell her what has happened to me. Tell her Witold sent you.' I gave her the address. Witold was my pseudonym in the Underground.

'Today,' she said quietly.

After I had made this request, I felt a great burden slip from my mind. Not that I expected much to materialize from it, but at least it lightened the feeling of being alone in a hostile world. It gave me a friend whom I could trust completely and in whose character I had confidence. A measure of hope was restored to me.

When I saw the sister again, I looked at her with questioning eyes.

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She whispered 'In a few days, you will be visited by a nun from a convent near-by.'

'A nun? Why should a nun visit me?'

'I don't know. I was told to give you this message.'

'But it doesn't make sense.'

'Have patience.'

I was on tenterhooks for the next two days. I realized that if my friends were going to the length of sending a person as innocuous in appearance as a nun to visit me, it meant that some definite plan was already afoot. The third day after this conversation, shortly after noon, the nun arrived. She moved toward as if on tiptoe, approaching my bed with short hesitant steps.

There was a vague familiarity about her delicate, pale face, but I could not place her as I was peeping with one eye, not daring to allow myself a closer scrutiny till she reached the bed. Then recognition was quickly kindled in an instant of excitement and fear. It was the sister of the guide who had been apprehended with me by the Gestapo.

Her voice was girlish but firm as she introduced herself.

'I am a nun from a near-by convent. The German authorities have permitted us to bring cigarettes and food to the prisoners. Is there anything you need?'

I simulated great weakness and murmured inaudibly so that she would have to stoop to hear me. She understood this maneuver and said in a voice distinct enough to be heard by the guard

I am sorry, I can't hear you'

Then stooping over, she whispered, 'Word has been sent to your superior. Be patient'

I have learned the technique of speaking without moving my lips.

'What happened to your brother? I asked her, keeping an eye on the guard. Tears welled up in her eyes.



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'We haven't heard from him.'

It was no use attempting to console her. Losses of that kind cannot be mitigated.

'I want you tell them that I must have some poison. I am sure the Gestapo have brought me here to make me give away the Underground in this vicinity. I can't stand any more torture.'

'I understand. Take good care of yourself. I will return in a few days.'

The period till she returned was one of endless suspense. It was like being thirsty and seeing water at a distance which was too great to be reached. Beyond the hospital walls, plans were being formulated for my rescue and I could almost taste liberty and freedom in the offing. It was maddening to be in bed, waiting.

When she finally returned, she brought me fruit and cigarettes and placed them on the shelf next to my bed. Again we employed the stratagems devised during her first visits. I muttered. She stooped, cupping her hand to her ear. Then we would whisper, hurriedly, our words tumbling over each other in our desire to crowd as much information as possible into a short moment. She began to speak with tremulous excitement and I had to stroke her hand surreptitiously to calm her and prevent her from raising her voice.

'They know everything,' she gasped. 'You have been awarded the Cross of Valor.'

She pretended to smooth my pillow and whispered without looking at me: 'I have just put a cyanide pill under your pillow. It kills quickly. I implore you, don't use it unless you are absolutely sure the worst has come.'

I looked at her gratefully.

After her departure, I felt a surge of courage and determination. I was now armed against the worst contingencies. The poison gave me a sense of luxury, a feeling that I had a magic talisman against the eventualities which I had

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dreaded most—torture and the possibility that I might crack and betray the organization. As soon as I could I went to the lavatory and carefully hid the tiny capsule. She had left me piece of flesh-colored adhesive for the purpose, the hiding place being the customary one for—prisoners—the perineum.

So great was this feeling of security that it served even to quell my disappointment at the fact that the nun had given no intimation of a plan for my escape. Not wishing to appear querulous or demanding, I had stifled the questions that had been on the tip of my tongue all during her visit. However, events soon began to move with a much greater rapidity than I had anticipated.

That evening the young doctor with the fresh, ingenuous face of a country lad, came to give me what I presumed was merely a routine examination. When he was through, he peered quizzically at my face as if trying to read in it my chances for recovery. Then in a normal, semi-humorous tone that left me aghast at his seeming imprudence, he drawled .

‘ Well, you are going to be set free tonight. . . . ’

I started as though I had been stung. Sitting bolt upright, I hissed indignantly, ‘ Are you mad ? Don’t talk so loud ! The guard will hear you. He has left only for a moment—probably to get water or something. For Heaven’s sake, watch yourself and be careful . ’

He chuckled good-humoredly. ‘ Don’t worry. We have bribed him. He won’t come back while I am here. Now listen carefully. Everything has been arranged. At midnight, I will pass this room and light a cigarette. That is your cue. Hop into your clothes and go to the first floor. On one of the window sills you will find a rose. Jump from that sill. Men will be stationed below. ’

He paused a moment. ‘ Is everything clear ? ’

My heart pounded like a trip-hammer.

‘ Yes, yes, I understand perfectly, ’ I repeated his directions in a strained voice.

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He grinned and patted me on the shoulder.

'Relax,' he said, 'and don't worry. Good luck!'

He could not have given me advice more impossible to follow. The one thing humanly out of the question for me was to rest or relax. A thousand doubts rose to my mind. I thought feverishly of innumerable precautions and contingencies. Most of my time I spent in scrutinizing the guard who returned to his post shortly afterwards. Could he have merely pretended to accept the bribe in order to set a trap for my comrades?

Some time before midnight the guard pretended to drop off into a deep sleep. His head on his chest, he emitted stentorian snores. Precisely as the church clock tolled the hour of midnight, the figure of the doctor appeared in the doorway. He drew a cigarette from his pocket, lit it with slow, conspicuous gestures and moved on. I gave the ward a cursory inspection. An encouraging medley of snores, breathing, and sleepy groans issued from all sides. I slid out of bed, took off my hospital pajamas and stuffed them under the cover. I transferred the cyanide pill to my hand, ready, to swallow it in case of sudden danger. Completely naked, I padded down to the first floor.

Slightly bewildered, I studied the dimly lit corridor. My sense of direction had vanished momentarily and since there were two similar staircases, I could not tell which was the front or the back of the hospital. In this strange dilemma, I felt a draft of cold air on my back. I reasoned that a window had been left open for me as whoever had engineered the scheme would probably realize that I would be unable to open one unaided.

I headed in the direction of the open window. My heart leaped with exultation as I saw the rose, which had been blown from the sill to the floor. I stared for a moment at the inky blackness below and then, taking a deep, decisive breath, I clambered to the sill and jumped without further ado, still clutching the little pill.

As I hit the ground and began to totter, a pair of strong

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arms caught and held me erect. The suddenness of the embrace frightened me and for a moment I thought I was in the hands of the Gestapo. My relief was immense when one of them slipped a coat over me, handed me a pair of trousers and rapped out commandingly.

'Hurry, we haven't a moment to lose. Run like the devil.'

Like myself, they were all barefooted. We sped across the lawn until we reached a fence. I had not the faintest idea who my rescuers were or to what underground organization they belonged. We paused at the fence, panting from the sprint.

One of them spoke. 'It will be impossible for you to get over the fence without help. This is what we will do. I'll climb over first. Then our friend will bend down. You get on his back, climb on the fence and jump. I'll catch you.'

He scrambled neatly over the fence. We performed the operation as he had directed. Then the other member came over. When we were all together, we continued to run, over a muddy field, across two paved roads toward a row of protecting trees. My bare feet began to smart and pain, my ribs ached and I felt a burning, choking sensation in my lungs each time I inhaled. Finally, I stumbled, pitched forward and collapsed on the ground, gasping for breath.

'I can't make it,' I gasped. 'I am sorry to cause you so much trouble but I must have some rest.'

They did not answer me. One of the men, an unusually tall, burly individual, reached down and flung me over his shoulder as though I had been a bundle of old clothes. I must have lost a great deal of weight for he carried me, without the slightest stager, into the woods.

When we were well within the comforting darkness, one of the men gave an audible sigh of relief.

'I guess we can rest here a bit,' he suggested to the man on whose shoulder I hung limply.

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The letter deposited me on a mound of earth under a tree. I leaned back against the tree, trying to recover my breath and bearings. They lit cigarettes and offered me one, which I waved away speechlessly. After a few puffs, they held a brief monosyllabic conversation, stood up and threw away the butts, ready to resume the trek.

'Do you think you can walk yet?' the tall, burly one asked me.

'I—I don't think so. Have we far to go?'

Without answering, he bent down again and flipped me over his shoulder. They walked at a steady methodical pace for about fifteen minutes and then emerged from the woods onto what looked like a broad, open field. The moon, which had been obscured by clouds, broke through, illuminating a river so that I saw the faint silvery glimmer of water before us. The two men stopped and my carrier set me on my feet. The other placed his fingers in his mouth and emitted a thin, piercing whistle.

From behind the bushes to our right, two men stepped forward—two of the hardest, toughest-looking individuals I have ever encountered. One of them held a revolver in his hand and the other, a long knife which glinted evilly in the moonlight. As they approached they loosed, in measured, controlled tones, a series of hair-raising curses directed at the Germans. From time to time they remarked caustically that there was 'always trouble with these intellectuals.' They held a brief, inaudible conference with my rescuers and took up positions as guards, while the husky whom I judged to be the leader of the expedition beckoned me to follow him along the reedy, marshy ground by the side of the river.

We churned through the slush until a man who had apparently been lying prone in the reeds jumped up and confronted us, his face split in a wide grin.

'Good evening, gentlemen,' he greeted us.

I recognized him immediately. His name was Staszek Rosa. I had first met him in Cracow. He was a

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young Socialist and although I knew he was well-informed about the Underground, I was puzzled by his flippancy and apparent carelessness. I had never suspected him of being so deep in organization work. For this reason, I was surprised to see him and even more astonished to realize that this devil-may-care attitude was a convenient cloak to hide the courage and determination necessary for the important work he was doing.

He directed his attentions to me by slapping my shoulder goodhumoredly and chortling, 'Congratulations, Jan, on your divorce from the Gestapo. I bet that was one wedding you didn't care for, eh?'

'No, I can't say that I enjoyed it much. Where do we go from here?'

'Follow me, you heroes,' he chirped. He walked a few paces, bent over, waved his hands in the air like a magician on a stage and then proceeded to draw out a canoe which had been cleverly concealed in the thick underbrush.

'Presto, there it is,' he announced when the task was finished.

We boarded the canoe, giving the paddle to the man who had carried me. We headed for the opposite bank of the river against a heavy current. The canoe rocked violently, tilting out of the water at a dangerous angle. At one point, it slanted so far over on its side that I lost my balance and plunged into the water. The big fellow put down his paddle, steadied the canoe and hauled me back as though I had been a fish.

We struggled against the tricky tide for more than an hour, while I lay prone on the bottom of the canoe, soaked to the skin, shivering and trying to control my chattering teeth. When we reached the shore, we clambered out, wading in a couple of inches of water and then they concealed the canoe again. On shore I swung my arms and stamped up and down, trying to restore a little warmth to my benumbed body.

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When the canoe was concealed, we began talking, Staszek Rosa leading the way.

'Well,' he said, 'it won't be long before you are in your new home'

We cut through a dense wood, then across a field of wheat, and, finally, after what seemed to me an extremely circuitous route, stopped in front of a barn.

'The end of the line. All off' my humorous friend announced.

We entered the barn. The warmth, the fresh odor of the hay were overwhelmingly soothing to my fatigued senses.

'We must leave you here,' he said. 'Your host will pay his respects tomorrow. He will see to it that you are well-hidden for a while. You will be contacted as soon as the Gestapo chase slackens off'

I began to express my gratitude for the dangerous task they had undertaken on my behalf. Rosa cut me off, a faint, derisive smile on his thin lips.

'Don't be too grateful to us. We had two orders about you. The first was to do everything in our power to help you escape. The second was to shoot you if we failed. You were lucky ..'

And after a moment he added 'Be grateful to the Polish workers—they saved you.'

I gaped at him in dumbfounded amazement.

'Pleasant dreams,' he chuckled, and turned to leave with the other who broke his phlegmatic silence for the first time to bid me farewell. I climbed up onto the loft and sank wearily into the soft hay. I was a free man again.

